

CHURCH AND STATE FROM PAUL TO I PETER

by

Frank Leo Finkbiner

**A Dissertation Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY**

June 1960

This dissertation, written by

Frank Leo Finkbiner

*under the direction of his Faculty Committee,
and approved by its members, has been presented to
and accepted by the Faculty of the Southern California
School of Theology in partial fulfillment of the re-
quirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

Faculty Committee

Eric L. Titus
Chairman

Earl Cranston

Floyd H. Ross

Harvey Kuper

William H. Fisher

Date June 1960

Earl Cranston

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
Claremont, California

FINAL ORAL EXAMINATION

of

FRANK LEO FINKBINER

B.A., McKendree College, 1950
B.D., Perkins School of Theology, 1953

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

Friday, May 20, 1960, 1:00 p.m.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

PROFESSOR TITUS, *Chairman*
PROFESSOR CRANSTON
PROFESSOR ROSS
PROFESSOR FISHER
PROFESSOR SEIFERT

OUTLINE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Major:

Interpretation of the New Testament: Seminar	Titus
Life of Jesus	Titus
Textual Criticism of the New Testament : Seminar	Titus
Religious Environment of Early Christianity: Seminar	Titus
Background of the New Testament	Davis
The Literature of the New Testament	Davis
The Johannine Literature	Davis
The Life and Teachings of Jesus.	Davis
The Revelation of John	Davis

Supplementary Studies:

Church and State: Seminar	Moehlman
Judaism until 70 A.D.	Titus
History of the Christian Church	Goodloe
Myth, Symbol, Ritual in World Religions: Seminar	Ross
Culture Patterns in Old Testament Thought: Seminar	Fisher
World Religions, Buddhism: Seminar	Ross
World Religions, Hinduism: Seminar	Ross
The Protestant Reformation: Seminar	Moehlman
Old Testament: Seminar	Fisher
Churches and Their Communities	Seifert
Religious Aspects of Personality Development	Johnson
Christian Ethics	Grimes
History and Meaning of the Christian Sacraments	Goodloe
The Use of the Bible in Religious Education	Grimes
Philosophy of Religion	Marlatt

DISSERTATION

CHURCH AND STATE FROM PAUL TO I PETER

The attitude of the Christian movement toward the Roman government has presented students of the New Testament with one of its most perplexing problems. This, is due, in part, to the silence of many of the New Testament writers on this subject. Only Paul, the author of Revelation, and the writer of I Peter deal boldly with the question. From the Gospels and from Acts it is possible to discern a point of view, but it apparently was not the intent of the composers of these passages to deal singularly with this particular matter.

This study investigates the attitude of Paul, and then attempts to discover how this concept developed or changed through the experience of the Neroian persecution, the writing of the Synoptics, the writing of Revelation, and in the Pliny-Trajan correspondence as this is examined in relation to I Peter.

In addition to the biblical sources, much help is to be found in the compositions of such Christian authors as I Clement, Ignatius, Tertullian and Eusebius. It is fortunate that the works of Dio, Suetonius, and Tacitus are available as these fill in gaps left by the Christian writers, and also present the problem from the perspective of the Roman historian.

Oscar Cullmann has created interest in this subject by insisting that the New Testament attitude toward Rome was not one of appreciation as has often been assumed. The interpretation of the trial of Jesus is also a major factor in the understanding of this question, and Conrad Moehlman has contributed greatly by presenting the trial in a clearer light. R. H. Charles has been equally helpful in dealing with Revelation, as well as with the entire scope of apocalyptic literature.

The findings of this study may be summarized as follows: The New Testament attitude toward the State maintains remarkable consistency with the notable exception of Revelation. Paul established a trend in his letter to the Romans that is both directly and indirectly reflected in the works of subsequent writers. A part of this may be expressed in these concepts: the existence of the State was consistent with the will of God, the State was an instrument through which justice was to be maintained, and the State had the responsibility to maintain a society in which Christianity could flourish. The author of Revelation stood in radical disagreement with this conviction, but his tone does not appear in the work of a single contemporary. Yet, the question remains, why were the Christians as a whole so willing to come to the defense of Rome? The answer to this is complex, and is not clear in every facet. It is partially due to the Christian-Jewish relationship. Invalid as it might have been, a majority of Christians saw Judaism as the primary enemy, and this caused them to turn to Rome with an enthusiasm that was unrealistic. But this does not explain why the feeling did not change under the strain of persecution. There are two reasons for this. First is the probability that the persecutions were less severe than has generally been thought. Little or no detail is offered either by Christian or non-Christian sources as to the actual number involved or the duration of the harassments. Secondly, the early Christians associated the persecutions more with the persons of the debased Nero and Domitian than they did with the government per se. The Roman populace suffered as much under these tyrants as did the Christians. It is not until the second century when they were persecuted for the "Name" only, and when it was done under a just and benevolent ruler, that the Christians realized they could not live peacefully with Rome.

FRANK LEO FINKBINER

- 1928 Born in Palestine, Illinois
- 1946 Graduated from High School, Hutsonville, Illinois
- 1950 B.A., McKendree College, Lebanon, Illinois
- 1953 B.D., Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Texas
- 1953 Ordained by the Southern Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church
- 1955 Minister of the Orangethorpe Methodist Church, Fullerton, California

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
The Problem	
The Method of Procedure	
Sources	
II. PAUL'S ATTITUDE TOWARD ROME	7
The Writings of Paul	
The Book of Acts	
III. THE NERONIAN PERSECUTION	41
Rome and Foreign Cults	
The Fire	
IV. THE ATTITUDE OF THE GOSPELS	76
The Presence of Rome in Palestine	
The Trial of Jesus	
V. THE BOOK OF REVELATION	103
The Nature of Apocalyptic	
The Author and Date	
Emperor Worship	
Interpretation	
VI. PLINY AND I PETER	150
The Times and Writings of Pliny	
The Date and Significance of I Peter	
VII. CONCLUSION	187
The State and the Will of God	
The Christian-Jewish Schism	
The Continued Christian Sympathy for Rome	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	198

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The attitude of the Christian movement toward the Roman government has presented students of the New Testament with one of its most perplexing problems. First impressions lead one to believe that Paul had great confidence in the State. But are his statements concerning the government a true expression of his point of view, or do they refer only to a specific problem, being therefore, unable to bear the general burden of proof that has been placed on them? If Paul were genuinely convinced of the values of the Roman government, how did the persecution of Nero affect this point of view? Is this persecution an indication of a godless institution, or is the emperor using the institution erroneously? Are the Gospel writers reflecting true feelings for Rome, or are they Apologists for the sake of expediency? The Book of Revelation leaves less question as to its point of view, but is it speaking for the Christian Church, or is its view the opinion of an isolated few, or of only one man? And then, to what period does I Peter belong? Is its view an attempt to quiet a growing fear and dislike of Rome in the second century, or

is it from an earlier period, and are its references to "authorities" only casual statements which are of limited significance in this study? These are some of the questions which must be answered before one can determine the attitude of early Christianity toward the Roman Government.

These queries, then, bring us to the even more engrossing question: Did the attitude of the Church toward the State change from the time of Paul to I Peter? If so, what were the phases through which it progressed?

The Method of Procedure

The investigation of the problem of Church and State indicated that the scope of this study included five areas for discussion. The first of these is the writings of Paul, and coupled with this is the Book of Acts, which, because of its affinity to Paul, needs to be included in the consideration of this apostle, even though it was written some two decades later.

The second area concerned the great persecution under Nero. Few events have left a greater imprint on the Church than did this action by the man who is considered to be the first emperor to persecute the Church. It is necessary to determine some of the extent of this persecution, and equally as important, to discover the reason for it. Acquisition of this information is essential in order to learn at what point persecution of the Christians became

a continuing practice of the Roman government.

The third chapter of the study centers in the attitude of the Synoptic Gospels toward Rome. It is necessary to deal with the elusive problem of whether the Synoptics are presenting the point of view of Jesus, or that which was prevalent among the Christians at the time of the writings of the Synoptics, some three to six decades after the crucifixion of Jesus. A basic aspect of this point of view is the re-interpretation of the trial story as presented by each of the Gospels.

A crucial point in this study is Revelation. Few, if any, writings have been a cause of as great confusion as has this work. An understanding of the principle of apocalyptic literature is the point at which one must begin, and then move to an interpretation of the material, which in turn leads to a rather clear view of the composer's attitude toward the Roman Government.

The concluding area of discussion is the highly important correspondence between the Roman Emperor, Trajan, and the governor of Bithynia and Pontus, Pliny the Younger, which must then be considered in the light of I Peter. A preliminary step in this consideration is the determining of the date for the writing of I Peter.

It will be of help to keep in mind the attitude of Paul, who was the earliest and one of the more voluminous writers, as a norm against which each of the succeeding

points of view may be compared. This is not to pre-judge in the sense of indicating that this was the prevalent point of view, but it is a comparative method by which one may discern the direction in which the outlook happened to be moving.

Sources

The sources available for the second chapter are primarily: the writings of Paul, particularly Romans, and I Corinthians; and the Book of Acts. The works coming directly from Paul can be recognized as of unlimited value, but in dealing with Acts there develops a whole new problem which must be discussed before interpretation is attempted. A serious effort at understanding the Pauline attitude toward the State must consider the work of Oscar Cullmann, The State in the New Testament.¹ His interpretation, which veers from the more traditional point of view, must be dealt with, particularly in relation to Romans and I Corinthians, before one can proceed far in a discussion of this matter.

The persecution by Nero, which is almost completely ignored by the New Testament, is vividly described by Tacitus; but while Suetonius affirms that there was such a persecution, his reference to it is almost casual as though it was of comparative unimportance to the Roman government.

¹Oscar Cullmann, The State in the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956).

I Clement alludes to the death of Peter and Paul, and Ignatius speaks of Paul's death, while Eusebius refers to the tradition that both Paul and Peter died in Rome during the persecution by Nero, but this information is for the most part derivative and inconclusive.

The Synoptics are the source for the fourth section of the paper. Here, again, it is necessary to deal with the concepts of Oscar Cullmann, for he presents a point of view which is not easily reconciled with the statements of the Synoptics. In considering the trial of Jesus, invaluable help is to be found in the work of Conrad Moehlman, The Christian-Jewish Tragedy.¹ He has probably done more to bring this story back into proper perspective than has any other writer.

Revelation has no other biblical source to fortify its description of the so-called persecution of Domitian, and has limited non-biblical Christian support. I Clement is the only writer of that time who referred to it, and even this reference is not certain. Eusebius makes a passing reference to the persecution but evidently did not consider it to be equal to the one instigated by Nero. The writer who has contributed markedly to the understanding of the apocalyptic literature and, specifically, of Revelation is R. H. Charles in his two-volume work, The Apocrypha and

¹Conrad Moehlman, The Christian-Jewish Tragedy (Rochester: The Printing House of Leo Hart, 1933).

Pseudepigrapha¹ and in The Revelation of St. John,² which also appeared in two volumes.

The sources for the concluding section include the letter of Pliny to Trajan, and the reply from the emperor, which correspondence must then be considered in view of the epistle of I Peter. Once again, there is a minimum of confirmation for this persecution from other sources, either Christian or non-Christian, but there is adequate information within these three brief writings to offer one of the more exciting investigations of the study.

¹R. H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1913).

²R. H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950).

CHAPTER II

PAUL'S ATTITUDE TOWARD ROME

The Writings of Paul

There are four passages in the writings of Paul which must be considered in an attempt to determine his attitude toward the State. They are: Romans 13:1-7; I Corinthians 2:8; 6:1-7; and II Thessalonians 2:6-7. In addition, there are passages in the Book of Acts which throw light on the problem. They are: 16:16-40; 21:31-39; 23:1-5; 23:26-30; and 25:6-12. These passages are not all of equal value. At least one may have been erroneously interpreted in the past, and possibly does not concern this question at all.

The writings of Paul will be considered first.

After his conversion experience, it is possible that much of Paul's thinking was influenced by his concept of the parousia.¹ It is true that his concept of this may have changed. It was necessary for him to write a letter to the Church in Thessalonica (II Thessalonians) warning that the day of the Lord had not come, and that they were to continue working as usual. Evidently, the Thessalonians

¹Kirsopp Lake, The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul (London: Rivingtons, 1927), pp. 77ff.

had gained the impression that the day was imminent. Paul may have recognized that it would be longer delayed than he first had thought.¹ Yet, later, when he wrote to the Corinthians about A.D. 55² he said, "I give thanks to God . . . that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."³

Thus, it would appear that Paul's imminent eschatology did not force him to face the question of Christianity versus the State in the same manner that the Gospel writers were forced to deal with it. His comments in this area, then, may be intended to deal with more immediate problems rather than to create a philosophy concerning the matter of Church and State.

Before attempting to determine the meaning of Romans 13:1-7, it would be well to discuss when and why the work was written. Paul makes it clear that he is on the way to Jerusalem to present the offering that he had been taking "for the saints."⁴ Thus, it is likely that this

¹J. W. C. Wand, What St. Paul Said (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 25.

²While this date is generally accepted, it should be pointed out that Knox maintains an early date of A.D. 51-53. For this see, John Knox, Chapters in the Life of Paul (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), p. 86.

³I Cor. 1:4a, 7a.

⁴Rom. 15:25.

passage was written while on his last visit in Corinth, since it was only shortly after this sojourn that his imprisonment began in Jerusalem.¹ The actual dating of this writing is dependent upon one's chronology of Paul, but many place it about A.D. 58.² Again an exception is made by John Knox, who places it about five years earlier.³ In any case it would be several years before Paul's death, but near the end of his missionary efforts. His reason for writing such a lengthy article to a church which he expected to visit so soon is not clear. Perhaps he had time in which to express at length his theological point of view.

It is well to note that Romans was written during the interval in which good government prevailed. The concept of Nero is often drawn from the picture of his later years. Becoming emperor in A.D. 54, he was a popular and acceptable ruler during his early years.

. . . Rome was prepared to welcome the new emperor with genuine enthusiasm. His prestige and his good qualities, carefully fostered by Seneca, made him popular, while his darker passions were as yet unsuspected. His first acts confirmed this favorable impression. He modestly declined the title of "pater patriae"; he promised to follow the principles of Augustus, and his clemency, liberality and affability were the talk of Rome.

¹John Knox, "Introduction, The Epistle to the Romans," The Interpreter's Bible, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954), IX, 358.

²A. M. Hunter, The Epistle to the Romans (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1955), p. 14.

³John Knox, Chapters in the Life of Paul, p. 86.

Much of the credit of all this is due to Seneca and Burrus. Seneca had seen from the first that the real danger with Nero lay in the savage vehemence of his passions, and he made it his chief aim to stave off by every means in his power the dreaded outbreak. The policy of indulging his tastes and helping him to enjoy the sweets of popularity without the actual burdens of government succeeded for the time. During the first five years of his reign, little occurred to dampen the popular enthusiasm. Nero's promises were fulfilled, and the senate found itself free to discuss and even to decide important administrative questions. Abuses were remedied, the provincials protected from oppression, and the burden of taxation lightened. On the frontiers no serious disaster occurred, and even the murder of Britannicus was accepted as a necessary measure of self-defense.¹

At the death of Agrippina:

Nero was horror struck at the enormity of the crime and terrified at its possible consequences. But a six months' residence in Campania, and the congratulations which poured in upon him from the neighboring towns, where the report had been officially spread that Agrippina had fallen a victim to her treacherous designs upon the emperor, gradually restored his courage. In September 59 he re-entered Rome amid universal rejoicing.²

Suetonius also indicates that Nero's reign began with favorable indications.

To make his good intentions still more evident, he declared that he would rule according to the principles of Augustus, and he let slip no opportunity for acts of generosity and mercy, or even for displaying his affability. The more oppressive sources of revenue he either abolished or moderated. He reduced the rewards paid to informers against violators of the Papian law to one fourth of the former amount. He distributed four hundred sesterces to each man of the people, and

¹Encyclopedia Britannica, "Nero" (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1953 edition), XVI, 230.

²Loc. cit.

granted to the most distinguished of the senators who were without means an annual salary, to some as much as five hundred thousand sesterces; and to the praetorian cohorts he gave monthly allowances of grain free of cost. When he was asked according to custom to sign the warrant for the execution of a man who had been condemned to death, he said; "How I wish I had never learned to write!"¹

Even Tacitus, who made no attempt to hide his dislike for the emperor, spoke favorably concerning Nero's promise that he would not deny the prerogatives of the Senate. The assertion was made shortly after his coming to the throne, and Tacitus remarks,

Nor was the pledge dishonored, and many regulations were framed by the free decision of the senate.²

Eusebius too, agrees that it was not until later in Nero's reign that he became violent towards the Christians. He states that Paul was not executed during his first sojourn in Rome and that "probably in the beginning, when Nero was more easily disposed, Paul's answer for his doctrine was more easily received."³ He does say, however, that it was Nero who first persecuted the Christians. "Yet, with all these crimes, there still remained this to be written about him, that he should be the first of the emperors

¹Suetonius Nero, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 10.

²Tacitus The Annals, trans. John Jackson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), xiii. 5.

³Eusebius Ecclesiastical History, trans. Roy J. Defferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953), ii. 22.

to be pointed out as a foe of divine religion."¹ However, there is nothing to indicate, even though this be true, that his enmity began immediately upon his becoming emperor. Suetonius also implies that there was no persecution of the Christians during the early part of Nero's reign. It is significant that the following statement by Suetonius is accepted by some scholars as proof that at least at the time of the disturbance of Jews in Rome about A.D. 52 the Christians were regarded as another of the Jewish sects. "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."² It is possible that this point of view existed well into the period of Nero's reign. Therefore, if the date of A.D. 58 or earlier is accepted as being the time for the writing of Romans, there is reason to believe that persecution of the Christians had not yet become a practice. Certainly, Paul felt no breach between himself and the Roman government. The protection which Rome afforded him as a citizen cannot be overlooked.

Paul must have had a great sense of indebtedness to the State, concerning protection from violence, as well as for the excellent road system and other government-provided facilities which expedited his travels. However, this sense of obligation does not mean that he would have been

¹Eusebius Ecclesiastical History ii. 25.

²Suetonius The Deified Claudius 53.

been blinded to the evils that existed within the government.

Further concerning the government, Paul says:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.¹

There was precedent for the statement made in the first verse. Though admittedly it is under different circumstances, a Jeremiah passage shows interesting similarities.

Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, says the Lord, and for Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants.²

Also, from the Wisdom of Solomon:

¹Rom. 13:1-7.

²Jer. 25:8-9a.

Listen therefore, kings, and understand;
Learn, O judges of the ends of the earth.

For your dominion was given you from the
Lord,
And your sovereignty from the Most High.¹

It would appear that Paul is following in the tradition of recognizing that the authorities had been divinely ordained. The authorities were not without limitations, but neither could they rightfully be ignored.

The apostle's reason for advising obedience to government is not clear. It may have come to his mind because he was writing to Rome, which was the seat of the government. Or it may have been a follow-up of his statement just preceding this: "Beloved never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."² Or perhaps it was to offset the impetuosity of some who would have led into anarchy. This obedience to government was a continuous Jewish problem, as is pointed out by the history of the first century. Sepphoris had been left in utter ruin after an abortive revolt attempt following the death of Herod the Great. The Zealot efforts were to lead Jerusalem to a similar tragic end in A.D. 70.³ The Christian movement with its

¹Wisdom of Solomon 6:1a, 3a.

²Rom. 12:19a, 21.

³Elmer Mould, Essentials of Bible History (New York: The Ronald Press, 1951), p. 494.

concept of the parousia may have attracted a rabid element which was chafing under the rule of Rome, and Paul may have considered it wise to counteract this influence.

If the choice had been between obedience to the government and revolt, Paul would have been on the side of obedience. It will be pointed out later that this preference continued to be the position of many Christians even after the persecutions had begun.

Much has been made of the idea that Paul considered the State the implement by which God wreaked vengeance. John Bennett points out the relationship between this passage and the statement: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."¹ Concerning this he writes:

In that context it is clear that one reason for Paul's emphasizing the state in the following chapter is that it is the means by which the Wrath of God is made effective in society.²

Oscar Cullmann expresses a similar point of view.

The State is concerned with the judicial principle of the retribution of evil. Indeed it even bears the sword, we hear in v. 4, while the Christian is not to kill. Only God may take vengeance, and he avails himself of the service of the State for this purpose.³

Obedience to the State was a traditional point of view, as can be seen by earlier quoted passages from Jeremiah and the Wisdom of Solomon. Undoubtedly this was a part

¹Rom. 12:19.

²John C. Bennett, Christians and the State (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 29.

³Cullmann, op. cit., 57-58.

of Paul's thinking, for his Jewish background would have made him receptive to the idea. However, there is more to be considered than just this. Moffatt translates verses five and six as follows:

You must be obedient, therefore, not only to avoid the divine vengeance but as a matter of conscience, for the same reason as you pay taxes--since magistrates are God's officers, bent upon the maintenance of order and authority.

The phrase *ὁ δὲ τὴν συνείδησιν* is of key consideration in this discussion. The use of the word *συνείδησιν* makes it clear that it is not proper to respond simply out of fear, or for the purpose of avoiding retribution. Rather, this is a matter of the Christian conscience, and obedience is a position that cannot be avoided by the person who is to take his faith seriously.

It is interesting that he used the word *λειτουργοὶ*, which can be translated as a minister in the service of God or as a public office taken at one's own expense. Thus it appears that these officials were working as a part of the divine plan, whether they were aware of it or not. This same word is used in describing the ministry of Zechariah in the temple prior to the birth of John,¹ and then by Paul when he speaks of the Christian virtue of charity.² This designation, then, puts the authorities in a position

¹Luke 1:23.

²II Cor. 9:12.

other than merely being tools of the emperor, and grants to them a recognition that the purpose which they are fulfilling is an honorable one, and one that is at least to some extent under the direction of God, and seemingly, one that is pleasing to him. It must be understood that Paul does not feel at this particular time that the authorities were working in any manner which could be construed as contrary to the interest of the Church.

As this interpretation approaches the relationship in a positive manner, Paul's statement is understandable. He had been the recipient of benevolent authority once himself, for during his stay in Corinth, when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, he had been the center of an attack by the Jews. According to Acts, even before Paul had a chance to defend himself, Gallio saw the charge as a frame-up; he dismissed it and had the Jews removed from the tribunal.¹

However, it would be unfair to suppose that Paul felt everyone should support the State merely because it had been good to him. By making obedience a "matter of conscience," he apparently is raising it to a much higher level. This, then, becomes one of the virtues that is to be sought after by all Christians. Obedience to the State is not only

¹Acts 18:12-17. There has been question as to the possibility of the story being invented to accommodate a point which Luke desires to make. However, it seems more likely that he has utilized an episode which actually happened, to substantiate his concept. A discussion of the problem of Acts follows later in this section.

a form of expediency; it is a part of the calling for those who are to follow the new way of life. The fact that he included a reminder to be faithful in the paying of taxes, indicates he believed the levies were being used, at least in part, for a constructive purpose. In 13:7, he calls for more than just obedience or subservience; he demands respect. This again indicates that in his estimation, the State deserved the respect of Christians, and that it was the duty of all to give it.

Cullmann does not believe that Paul was so enthusiastic about Rome. In discussing 13:7 he points out a negative quality and states: "In the background, then, the tacit negative amplification stands here has well: 'Do not give them what is not their due.'"¹ This position could well be taken in the reign of Domitian, when he was demanding worship, but there is question as to whether there is convincing evidence that this was the feeling at the time of the writing of Romans.

Cullmann is undoubtedly correct, however, in his conviction that Paul saw the State as a temporary institution.² It would not be a part of the new order. But does Paul's thinking necessarily define the purpose of the government in the present order, as Cullmann feels it does?

¹Cullmann, op. cit., p. 59.

²Loc. cit.

It is difficult to examine this passage apart from knowledge of what was to happen only a few years later. One finds himself asking the question; How did Paul feel about the State at the time of his execution? This is pertinent in view of the over-all interest of this study. Yet, it should not influence the interpretation of what Paul actually meant when he composed Romans.

In dealing with the concept of the State there is a tendency to identify the State with a particular ruler. Though this tendency may be justifiable to a certain extent, especially concerning the Roman Empire of the first century, it does not necessarily follow that Paul would have done so.

In his later reign, Nero was extremely unpopular and was widely recognized as being depraved, a recognition which prompted the movement against him to develop rapidly after the great fire. In order to rebuild Rome, Italy as well as the provinces was ransacked.

It was the first occasion on which the provincials had suffered from Nero's rule, and the discontent it caused helped to weaken his hold over them at the very moment when the growing dissatisfaction in Rome was gathering to a head. Early in 65, Nero was panic-stricken by the discovery of a conspiracy involving such men as Faenius Rufus, Tigellinus's colleague in the prefecture of the praetorian guards, Plautius Lateranus, one of the consuls elect, the poet Lucan, and, lastly, not a few of the tribunes and centurions of the Praetorian guard itself. Their chosen leader, whom they destined to succeed Nero, was C. Calpurnius Piso, a handsome, wealthy and popular noble, and a boon companion of Nero. The plan to murder Nero was betrayed by a freedman Milichus. Piso, Faenius Rufus, Lucan and Sencea himself were executed.

In the next few months many more fell victims to his fear and resentment. Conspicuous among them was Paetus Thrasea, whose unbending virtue had long made him distasteful to Nero, and who was now suspected, possibly with reason, of sympathy with the conspirators. Poppaea died in the autumn of 65, and the general gloom was increased by a pestilence which followed the fire.¹

Suetonius provides an even more dramatic picture of the general dislike and distrust harbored against Nero near the end of his reign.

The bitter feeling against him was increased because he also turned the high cost of grain to his profit; for indeed, it so fell out that while the people were suffering from hunger it was reported that a ship had arrived from Alexandria, bringing sand for the court wrestlers.

When he had thus aroused the hatred of all, there was no form of insult to which he was not subjected. A curl was placed on the head of his statue with the inscription in Greek: 'Now there is a real contest and you must at last surrender.'²

Dio also deals with this latter period of Nero's life in unflattering detail. It will suffice to include his description of the emperor's attitude toward the Greeks during his time there in A.D. 67 and 68.

But, as it was, he devastated the whole of Greece precisely as if he had been sent out to wage war, notwithstanding that he had left the country free; and he slew great number of men, women and children.

At first he commanded the children and freedmen of those who were executed to leave him half their property at their death, and allowed the

¹Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit., p. 231.

²Suetonius Nero 45.

victims themselves to make wills, in order that he might not appear to be killing them for their money.¹

These outrages took place during what might be called his "good will" tour of that country.

In view of the complete dissatisfaction with which Rome viewed Nero, would Paul have considered him a true representative of the State? The personal dislike which he might have felt for the emperor would not necessarily have caused distaste for the government. The Christians were not the only victims of Nero's wrath.

It is true, however, that Romans 13:1-7 has been used to foster "divine right" in a way that is not compatible with Paul's concept. It was his intention to protect against anarchy, not to give license to those who would use the State for exploitation. The responsibility of the government is heavy. When he states that government is a terror to bad conduct, not to good conduct, undoubtedly he intends that the State be held responsible for good government. Since Romans was written at a time in which the State was carrying out this function in a satisfactory manner, there was no reason for him to point out the dangers it would be incurring if or when it failed to do so.

Could it be that this led Paul to believe that the Christians were closer to breaking the bond of responsibility to the State than Rome was of neglecting its duty to the

¹Dio's Roman History, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), lxii.2.1.

people? Whether or not Paul felt this way, or whether or not he continued to maintain this, is questionable. It is certain that some later Christians did not believe as Paul did at this particular time.

Another significant statement by Paul regarding loyalty to the State is found in I Corinthians.

When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life! If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren.¹

Verse four presents a textual problem that needs to be considered. The Greek reads: *βιωτικὰ μὲν οὖν κριτῆρια ἐὰν ἔχητε, τοὺς ἐξουθενημένους ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, τοὺς καθίξετε*; The King James Version has translated this to mean that those who are least esteemed in the Church are to be the judges. While Paul may have intended it to be understood in this manner for purposes of contrast, it does not seem probable that this was his intent. In the first place, if there were those in the Church who were lowly esteemed for some purpose, it would have been more in keeping

¹I Cor. 6:1-8.

with him to have directed a criticism toward them, rather than to suggest that they be used in the capacity of judges. An interpretation which may be closer to the spirit of the thinking of Paul, and which is reflected in the Revised Standard Version, is the thought that those who are least esteemed are the non-Christian judges. Though, again, this is not to suggest that the pagan judges were unjust in their decision, but merely to point out that they were not related to the Church and the people of the Church should not be taking their problems to the non-Christian court.

It is also to be noted that *κριτηριον* is used in two places, and while this is normally translated as "tribunal" or "court," it is understood in this instance to mean a "suit" or "case." The King James Version expresses the same thought by using the word, "judgement."

Oscar Cullmann has rightly suggested that careful consideration of both these passages is necessary to arrive at an understanding of Paul's attitude toward the State. But he draws from this passage a conclusion which needs to be noted. In speaking of I Corinthians 6:1-8 he says:

But admittedly this chapter shows us in an especially clear manner that it is false to ascribe to Paul in Romans 13:1 ff. the opinion that the State is by nature a divine form and that its principles are equally valid as those Jesus deduced from the expectation of the Kingdom of God.¹

¹Cullmann, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

Cullmann has indicated a helpful trend in thought. Yet, it seems possible that too great a burden of proof has been placed on the Corinthians passage.

It is true that Paul is gravely concerned because the people have become involved in lawsuits which have been taken before pagan judges. He points out that it is the eventual role of these people to judge the angels, therefore it is strange indeed that there is no one among them wise enough to handle these inconsequential matters which have come up before them. It is understandable that Paul was deeply concerned over such an unhappy situation.

It is Cullmann's understanding that this passage indicates disapproval of the courts operated by the State, and that Christians should have nothing to do with them under any circumstances. He points out that the State is not divine, it has merely been willed by God until the end of the present age.¹ If it were divine, then Paul would have had no objection to bringing matters before the courts.

Is it not possible that this is not the basis on which Paul asks Christians not to bring their problems before the courts of the State? Rather, might it not be because lawsuits under any circumstances were inconsistent with the actions of one who called himself Christian? Thus, the key to this would be in the following verses. "To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather

¹Ibid., p. 62.

suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren."¹

Thus, the concern appears to be with the wrong attitudes which have led people to litigation. In many areas the Christians were suspect both by the Jews and the Gentiles. It was Paul's contention that Christians should be perfect examples. Obviously, they could not be if they were to drag themselves through the accusations and recriminations often associated with court action. They could not be a source of inspiration to others if they so lowered themselves as to become involved in lawsuits.

Perhaps there had even been instances of Christians bringing lawsuits against each other. Certainly in such cases there should be someone among their own group who could arbitrate the dispute and thus keep it from becoming a public scandal. He also implies that if they are involved with someone outside the group it is better to be defrauded than to go to court. The most important matter was not what rightfully belonged to a man, but how one should live in relation to his Christian principles.

If this matter was the one with which Paul was concerned, then caution is required in using this passage to determine his attitude toward the State. His concept of Rome is irrelevant. Regardless of how good, or just, or

¹I Cor. 6:7-8.

divine the courts might have been, it still would have been wrong for a Christian to instigate a lawsuit.

It should also be remembered that Paul apparently did not hesitate to appeal to a higher court in the case of his own life. This appeal would cause one to believe that the above Corinthian passage is not a blanket objection to the use of Roman courts. He objected only when litigation involved such un-Christian attitudes as those which so often appeared in a lawsuit.

A third Pauline reference is to be found again in I Corinthians.

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."¹

It is 2:8 which directly concerns this study. A casual reading might lead one to think that Paul was referring to Pilate, Herod, or the Sanhedrin. However, it is widely agreed by scholars that this passage is a reference to the demonic, or angelic rulers, who according to ancient thinking, stood behind the human rulers and were the real guides of the destiny of men.²

¹I Cor. 2:6-9.

²Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 63 and Clarence T. Craig, "First Corinthians," *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. G.A. Buttrick.

It is difficult to see how this interpretation throws light on the problem. Paul's interest at this point is not directly concerned with Church and State relationship. Even if he had been thinking of earthly rulers, the fact that they were ignorant of the spiritual truths of Christianity does not greatly alter the conclusions reached from the previous passages. There is never the suggestion that the rulers have superior knowledge. Yet, this lack does not disqualify their being used for an important purpose, and one which can at least indirectly aid the Church, as Paul must have felt the Roman government did on many occasions. It is interesting to ponder whether Paul felt that the demonic powers, which, if they were doing their best to work against Christianity, were being successful. There is reason to doubt that he thought they were, since up to the time of this writing, the State, for the most part, had been more of a help to him than a hindrance.

The last of the passages from Paul's writings to be considered is from II Thessalonians.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you

(New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press 1953), X, 38. Craig points out that this view has been generally accepted since the time of Origen.

in any way; for the day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion to make them believe what is false.¹

The significant passage is 2:6-7. In 2:6 the restrainer is referred to in the neuter gender, and in 2:7 in the masculine. Being expressed both in the abstract and in the personal, this reference is probably intended to be to the same figure. It may be an institution to which he is referring, but since an individual would be at the head of it, it would not be incorrect to speak of it as personal.

It should be pointed out that there is no clear understanding of this passage. Evidently, the people to whom Paul was writing understood something that is not now known. As a result, help from this passage is limited. At times the understanding has been that the Roman Empire was the restraining force. On the basis of such interpretation there would be evidence that Rome, in the mind of Paul, was

¹III Thess. 2:1-11.

closely aligned with the cause of Christianity. It would seem that there is not sufficient knowledge of this passage to draw such a conclusion, although there is a temptation to do so and to insist that such an inference goes hand in hand with Romans 13:1-7. But in view of the indistinct understanding of it, it would seem wiser to recognize that helpful answers cannot be obtained from it at this time.

The Book of Acts

J. Spencer Kennard states: "Paul's lacerated back give the lie to his words 'Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.'"¹ But this impression is not gained by reading Acts. This observation introduces the problem of Acts. The question of its historical value has been the basis for much disagreement. Until the middle of the nineteenth century it was believed by most scholars that Acts was a factual presentation of the development of the early Church. It then fell under the criticism of many scholars including Edward Zeller and F. C. Overveck who reached the conclusion that the book had a minimum of historical value.² Later scholars felt this criticism to be too harsh. While it was admitted that facts were chosen that were sympathetic to Paul, it was thought that there was no systematic

¹J. Spencer Kennard, Render to God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 9.

²G. H. C. Macgregor, "Introduction to Acts" The Interpreter's Bible, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press 1954), IX, 13.

distortion of the facts.

Harnack went even farther in his defense. It was his opinion that in spite of certain inaccuracies, Acts still must be highly regarded as an historical authority.

Much fault has been found in general and in detail with his description of the origin and development of the non-Jewish Churches, and thus of the Church Catholic; but we forget that only a few decades later ideas sprang up which completely replace our author's conception of this historic process. In comparison with these, St. Luke's description is remarkably trustworthy.¹

But why might not a disciple of the apostles purposely suppress things and why because he has acted thus, must he be divested of this his qualification? Has not history itself in its inexorable yet providential progress made evident what a writer about the year 80 A.D. must relate and what he had to pass over? However, in regard to the author's representation of the attitude of the Roman magistrates, all objections of this kind that critics have proved to be worthless. He is certainly biased in this part of his narrative. He wished to show that the Roman authorities were much more friendly to the youthful Church than the Jewish authorities and the Jews, who unceasingly strove to stir them against the Christians. But this is in accordance with the actual fact:²

The point of view related in the above statements was agreed to by others, but the work of F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake titled The Beginning of Christianity threw the picture once again into confusion.

The purpose of the editor, as distinct from the plan of composition which he followed, is more

¹Adolf Harnack, Luke the Physician (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), pp. 125-126.

²Ibid., pp. 134-135.

important and more difficult. It can hardly be described by any simple formula. Few books are ever written with a single purpose. The preceding discussion shows that 'pure history'--the correct narration of all important events--cannot have been the aim of the editor. It was rather that object for which the Lucan writings have always been used--to give religious instruction. Therefore, it is possible to form an accurate idea of the type of Christian teaching which he put forward and his contemporaries accepted. But before considering this side of the matter it is well to notice another, which, even if secondary, was probably far more important to the mind of the writer than it is obvious to ours. Are not the Lucan writings an apology for Christianity to the heathen as well as a manual of instruction for the Christian.

It has often been recognized that, whatever else was the purpose of the writer of Acts, he was anxious to defend the Church against the suspicions of the official world. The general truth of this view rests securely on the internal evidence of the whole book, but it is difficult to formulate, because many facts well known to the writer are obscure to us.¹

It is impossible to determine the value of Acts as it relates to the problem of historicity. However, there is little reason to suppose that the events are completely the figment of the writer's imagination; though, admittedly, extraordinary care must be taken to decide what did actually happen and what did not.

The first incident to be discussed took place in Philippi.

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by

¹F. J. Foakes-Jackson & Kirsopp Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity (London: Macmillan & Co., 1922), II, 177-178.

soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.¹

But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police saying, "Let those men go." And the jailer reported the words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore come out and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now cast us out secretly? No! let them come themselves and take us out." The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens: So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison, and visited Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they exhorted them and departed.²

There is little reason to doubt the historicity of this.

Paul himself testifies to it: ". . . but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi. . . ." ³

¹Acts 16:16-24.

²Acts 16:35-40.

³I Thess. 2:2.

Nor would there have been value in including it as an apologetic.

The factor that provoked the conflict was the loss of property or of potential gain. A similar situation is found in a later experience concerning the silversmiths of Ephesus.¹ Though the trouble was not instigated by the State, the accusation was political in nature. The apostles were accused as Jews who were advocating customs that were not legal. It is certain that Jews were not popular in the Empire at the time as indicated by the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius.² The accusations were not against Paul and his friends as Christians, and in any case what they were preaching was not the real motivation for the complaint: it was the threatened loss of revenue that produced the charge. However, the charge, which may have been completely false, received immediate action chiefly because of the emotional involvement of Judaism at the moment.

The dismissal from jail and the apology come more directly to the point. If this is historical, Paul could easily have interpreted the Roman government as playing a role in his protection, thus spreading Christianity. However, the question does arise, why did he not state earlier that he was a Roman citizen if that status provided him such excellent protection? There is no answer to this.

¹Acts 19:24-27.

²Suetonius The Deified Claudius 53.

Perhaps the confusion was so great that there was no opportunity, or perhaps the incident is non-historical.

The second passage that is of interest in this study is the story of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. The conflict is between Paul and the Jews, and it concerns matters of religion, not of profit or loss. A riot had begun near the temple; Paul was being dragged away by the crowd which was in the act of killing him.

And as they were trying to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the tribune came up and arrested him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd shouted one thing, some another; and as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd; for the mob of the people followed, crying, "Away with him!"

As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; I beg you, let me speak to the people."¹

This entire section is fraught with difficulties. The defense that Paul makes following the above statement does not lessen the problem. If a riot existed, would he have been able to make a defense? The defense section can be

¹Acts 21:31-39.

dropped out beginning with the part of his being brought into the barracks at 21:37, and picked up again in 22:24, without detracting from the main stream of the story. The defense may have been what the author had heard Paul say on other occasions.

If the main stream of this story is accepted as historical, then the Roman government did come to Paul's defense, and probably saved his life. As it appears here, this was done even before he made his claim to Roman citizenship. He mentioned his citizenship only when it seemed that he might be mistreated by the tribune. This is not surprising, because even though he had been protected from a lynch mob, he still might have been held responsible for being a central figure in the creating of a riot.

On the following day, "desiring to know the real reason why the Jews accused him," the tribune took Paul before the Sanhedrin. This case, however, does not seem an adequate reason for convening that body. In this section another problem exists.

And Paul, looking intently at the council said, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day." And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall

not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"¹

Why did Paul not know the high priest? Had he been placed in office since Paul was last in Jerusalem, accounting for Paul's apparent failure to recognize him? Even if this were the case, would he not have been able to recognize him by the position that others who were present granted him?

If Paul was really genuine in his regret, and if he sincerely meant "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people," this incident does tell something about his concept of those in authority. But there is doubt that such was his attitude. It is possible that this remark was made not with respect, but with irony. If so, it has quite a different meaning. The section following this relates that he threw the Sanhedrin into an uproar by creating a dissension between the Sadducees and the Pharisees concerning their concepts of the resurrection. If he felt free to attack this body at its most vulnerable spot, knowing that this would throw it into an uproar, he may have felt no greater respect for the high priest and thus might well have been sarcastic in his remark to him. Could it be that he felt this group had no right to be judging him, and as a result refused to take them seriously?

¹Acts 23:1-5.

The next passage from Acts, with which this study is concerned, continues with the conflict.

Claudius Lysias to his Excellency the governor Felix, greeting. This man was seized by the Jews, and was about to be killed by them, when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. And desiring to know the charge on which they accused him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was accused about questions of the law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.¹

This episode is also beset with difficulties. A second appearance before the Sanhedrin would have been unusual. Therefore, the entire concept of the plot does not seem feasible. Paul's removal to Caesarea could have followed his claim to Roman citizenship rather than having been necessitated by the danger of a plot against his life. But it is not easy to dismiss the possibility that Paul's life was endangered in Jerusalem, and that it was the Roman government which moved to protect him.

Succeeding events point out that the State did not understand Paul, and was not always sympathetic to him. Yet, it is possible that Paul believed that if Rome only understood his motivations they would be sympathetic. Acts makes it clear that the Christians were not breakers of the law. Therefore, the only thing that prevented their having even

¹Acts 23:26-30.

greater protection was the ignorance of the local rulers. This apparently was the case in Philippi. That this point of view was to be altered later does not indicate that it was not held during this earlier period.

Obviously, the intent of the writer was to show that once more the Roman government had acted to protect Paul. Whether it did evidence this protection in the manner described is questionable. Certainly it did not do so with the intentions of protecting the infant movement. Yet, it may have appeared to the Christians that it was Rome who on several occasions became their ally against the Jews.

Paul's appeal to Caesar as he stood before Festus is one of the dramatic stories of the New Testament.

When he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea; and the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. And when he had come, the Jews who had gone down from Jerusalem stood about him, bringing against him many serious charges which they could not prove. Paul said in his defense, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended at all." But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem, and there be tried on these charges before me?" But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried; to the Jews I have done no wrong, as you know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death; but if there is nothing in their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar." Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you shall go."¹

¹ Acts 25:6-12.

It is implied that Paul was doing well with the Roman authorities. Why, then, did he appeal to Caesar? The suggestion that he did this in order to arrive more quickly in Rome is not plausible. There are two possibilities: Paul may have feared that he would fall into the hands of the Jews, or that they would somehow bring pressure to bear that would cause an unfavorable decision in his case. Or it may have been, contrary to the impression left by the writer, that Paul had not made a favorable impression before Festus, and that his case was actually going badly.

If the first of these alternatives describes the actual situation, this would once more point out that in the time of crisis, the Roman government provided a form of rescue. If the latter presents the correct picture, the conclusion is less obvious.

It has been the tendency to assume that the real reason was contrary to the one presented in Acts. If so, Paul's appeal to Caesar could have been an attempt to secure time, and hope that something would develop for the better in the future. However, there is little evidence that this was the case. Is it not just as likely that Paul did have great confidence in Rome, and that he was convinced that once the true story was placed before the highest officials he would quickly be exonerated? Up to this time he had suffered at the hands of Rome and on three

occasions he had been beaten.¹ Why had he not avoided these beatings by claiming his citizenship? In spite of the beatings, it still is possible that he held his faith in the State, and was convinced he would be freed once the State realized Christianity was not breaking the laws of Rome.

¹II Cor. 11:25.

CHAPTER III

THE NERONIAN PERSECUTION

Rome and Foreign Cults

In understanding the relationship between the Christian movement and Rome, it is important to remember that the rise of a cult was not a new experience for the empire.

Long before this sect was heard of, the state had developed a well-defined policy for dealing with foreign religions. In general this policy was syncretistic, that is to say, as the Romans conquered new communities their gods were gradually adopted into the Roman state worship. . . .¹

The Roman religion had lacked the vital principle of evolution which was so typical of the religion of Israel. As a result there was often an attempt to return to the unintelligible practices of the past. •

Roman religion was that of a practical, unimaginative, and patriotic people, fostering domestic and civic virtues and adapted to an agricultural society, but continually being overcome by ceremonial and elaborated by foreign accretions.²

As early as 496 B.C. the Sibylline Oracles were used, thus the beginning of Greek and Oriental influence. In A.D. 431 the cult of Apollo was introduced.

¹Leon Canfield, Early Persecutions of the Christians (New York: Hardy, Longmans, Green & Co., Agents, 1913), p.18.

²S. Angus, The Mystery Religions and Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 31.

However, the great crisis in Roman religion, and the point at which it was to reach its lowest ebb, was during the Hannibalic Wars.¹ The confusion and fear caused by Hannibal led to a growing distrust of the Roman gods. In addition, the influence of Greek thinking brought about cynicism in regard to the primitive Roman religion. The old religion became inadequate as Rome expanded politically and economically, as well as intellectually.

As the Roman Empire began to solidify, a change in attitude became obvious. Augustus was wise enough to take advantage of this trend. There was a genuine thanksgiving for the order and peace which had developed. He moved to mold state and religion together, and in 13 B.C. "Augustus took the title of Pontifex Maximus, which gave to his person a halo of sanctity and proved so effective that subsequent emperors, pagan and Christian, retained it."²

This change had come about slowly. During the wars with Hannibal there emerged a sense of sin with which the Roman religion could not deal. The Oriental cults offered a means of salvation--the hope for which the Roman people were looking. One of the earliest Oriental cults to be legally accepted was the Great Mother, having infiltrated from Phrygia in 204 B.C. while the outcome of the war with Hannibal was still in doubt. The following year Hannibal

¹Ibid., p. 32.

²Ibid., p. 37.

left, and when the crops became plentiful the cult was quickly accepted. Almost from the beginning it was under the control of the senate and magistrates.¹ There was a time during which it fell out of favor because of its orgiastic rites, but it was restored to a place of prominence under Claudius and remained a rival of Christianity, not disappearing from Rome until after A.D. 394.

Rome faced a different problem with the Bacchanalia in 185 B.C. The movement had been highly respected, but upon reaching Rome took violent forms. Various types of immorality, which attracted both men and women, many of noble birth, were reported. As a result, the senate gave specific instructions to investigate and to arrest those who were officiating in the movement. The suppression was stern and effective.²

Livy discusses in detail the discovery and repression of this cult. Though his sources might be questioned, they appear to be reliable enough to be of aid concerning this matter. Pressure was brought upon a woman called Hispala, to reveal the secrets of the cult. At first she refused to do so, but after being promised protection from those who might attempt to harm her, she reluctantly told what she knew.

¹Cyril Bailey, Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1932), p. 177.

²Ibid., p. 179.

From the time that the rites were performed in common, men mingled with women and the freedom of darkness added, no form of crime, no sort of wrongdoing, was left untried. There were more lustful practices among men with one another than among women. If any of them were disinclined to endure abuse or reluctant to commit crime, they were sacrificed as victims. To consider nothing wrong, she continued, was the highest form of religious devotion among them. Men, as if insane, with fanatical tossings of their bodies, would utter prophecies. Matrons in the dress of Bacchantes, with disheveled hair and carrying blazing torches, would run down to the Tiber, and plunging their torches in the water (because they contained live sulphur mixed with calcium) would bring them out still burning. Men were all alleged to have been carried off by the gods who had been bound to a machine and borne away out of sight to hidden caves; they were those who refused either to conspire or to join in the crimes or to suffer abuse. Their number, she said, was very great, almost constituting a second state; among them were certain men and women of high rank.

Even though the abuses were discovered, and a thorough attempt was made to wipe out the movement, there was still a certain amount of tolerance. Quoting again from Livy:

For the future it was then provided by decree of the senate that there should be no Bacchanalia in Rome or Italy. If any person considered such worship to be ordained by tradition or to be necessary, and believed that he could not omit it without sin and atonement, he was to make a declaration before the city praetor, and the latter would consult the senate. If permission were granted to him, at a meeting where not fewer than one hundred were in attendance, he should offer the sacrifice, provided that not more than five people should take part in the rite, and that there should be no common purse or master of sacrifices or priest.²

¹Livy, trans. Evan T. Stage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), xxxix. 13.

²Livy xxxix. 18.

Though the restrictions were severe, it is still amazing that exceptions were made in the case of conscience. There is a notable lack of this kind of leniency in Cicero, however. In reciting his laws he states:

No one shall have gods to himself, either new gods or alien gods, unless recognized by the State. Privately they shall worship those gods whose worship they have duly received from their ancestors.¹

This law seems inconsistent with what is known of the first century, and perhaps was not applicable for that period. It should also be noted that this instruction was intended only for the Roman citizens.

The list of mystery religions having influence on Rome is long. Their existence indicates that the State was generally tolerant of cults, and this deduction has been pointed out as being particularly true in the case of Jews. Rome's objection became violent only when the cult actively opposed the government, or when it became orgiastic.

Mention has been made of the relationship of the Jews to the State. In the provinces, toleration was nearly complete, but in Rome itself the situation was different. The Jews were temporarily expelled under Tiberius and the men enrolled in the army.

Another debate dealt with the proscription of the Egyptian and Jewish rites, and a senatorial edict directed that four thousand descendants of enfranchised slaves, tainted with that superstition and

¹Cicero, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), ii. 8.

suitable in point of age, were to be shipped to Sardinia and there employed in suppressing brigandage: "if they succumbed to the pestilential climate, it was a cheap loss." The rest had orders to leave Italy, unless they had renounced their impious ceremonial by a given date.¹

It should be remembered that this persecution did not fall alone on the Jews, but was an attack on other religious groups as well.² Even though the Jews had received courtesies concerning their religion, they were coming to be hated in Rome and in many of the provinces. As was indicated earlier, according to the general opinion, and by statement of Suetonius, it is assumed that Claudious expelled the Jews from Rome. However, Dio Cassius does not seem to agree.

As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings.³

In any event, problems did exist at this time between the Jews in Rome and the Roman government. Any sympathy that Rome might have felt for the Jews was gone after the bloody rebellion which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

At first, the Christians were thought to be a part of the Jewish religion, so they inherited toleration, and

¹ Tacitus The Annals ii. 85.

² Supra, p. 45.

³ Dio's Roman History lx. 6. 6.

at the same time were regarded with a general suspicion and dislike. They were considered as the least desirable faction of society; though perhaps an even more serious complaint was the Christians' practice of upsetting the most highly cherished and accepted customs. The unknown Minucius Felix writes:

When Protagoras of Abdera, by the way of debate rather than of profanity, discussed the godhead, the men of Athens expelled him from their borders, and burned his writings in the market place. Is it not then deplorable that a gang--excuse my vehemence in using strong language for the cause I advocate--a gang, I say, of discredited and proscribed desperadoes band themselves against the gods? Fellows who gather together illiterates from the dregs of the populace and credulous women with the instability natural to their sex, and so organize a rabble of profane conspirators, leagued together by meetings at night and ritual fasts and unnatural repasts, not for any sacred service but for piacular rites, a secret tribe that shuns the light, silent in the open, but talkative in hid corners; they despise temples as if they were tombs; they spit upon the gods; they jeer at pity (save the mark) our priests; they despise titles and robes of honour, going themselves half-naked! What a pitch of folly! what wild impertinence! present tortures they despise yet dread those of an uncertain future; death after death they fear, but death in the present they fear not; for them illusive hope charms away terror with assurance of a life to come.¹

The refusal of the Christians to worship the gods who had made the State successful and strong was indeed puzzling to the Romans. The monotheism of the Jews and Christians seemed to be nothing more than unnecessary hard-headedness. The Romans had never found it difficult to

¹Minucius Felix Octavius, trans. Gerald Rendall (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 8. 3-5.

adopt another god, or several of them if need be for this would add to one's chances of success in war, and every other facet of life. To refuse to worship the gods was nearly the same as to openly oppose the government itself. It seemed dangerous not only for those who refused, but might very well endanger the security of the empire.

Tertullian's heated defense of the actions of the Christians indicates that feeling must have run high concerning some of these matters.

Even if I do not attend your rituals, well, I am a man on that day as much as any other. I do not buy a garland for my head. What difference does it make to you, how I use the flowers, if in any case I buy them? I think them more delightful when free, untied, wandering as they will. But suppose they please also when worked up into a garland, we know a garland by their noses; let them see to it who smell through their hair! We do not gather at the games; but the wares hawked at those assemblages, if I should wish them, I shall get more freely from their proper places. We certainly don't buy incense. If the lands of Araby complain, let the Sabaeans know that their wares are lavished at a higher and dearer price on burying Christians than on fumigating gods.

At any rate, you say, "the revenues of the temples are breaking down daily; how many are they who toss coins in there?" We cannot cope with both men and your gods begging together; and do not think alms should be given to others than those who ask. Come, let Jupiter hold out his hand and receive! In the meantime our compassions spreads more street by street than your religion temple by temple. But the other revenues may be grateful to Christians paying what is due with the same good faith that keeps us from cheating other men; so that, if an inquiry were made, how much is lost to the public exchequer by the fraud and lying of your declarations, and account could easily be struck--the

complaint on one side balanced by the gain in the rest of the accounts.¹

By the time he was writing, Tertullian strongly felt the contempt in which the Roman world held the Christians. This is a later date than that with which this dissertation is concerned, but it is likely that the point of view was held at least to some degree almost from the beginning. The following passage is one of the more vivid statements of what the general attitude must have been.

We are said to be the most criminal of men, or the score of our sacramental baby-killing and the baby-eating that goes with it and the incest that follows the banquet, where the dogs are our pimps in the dark, forsooth, and make a sort of decency for guilty lusts are overturning the lamps. That, at all events, is what you always say about us; and yet you take no pains to bring into the daylight what you have been saying about us all this long time. Then I say, either bring it out, if you believe this, or refuse to believe it after leaving it uninvestigated.²

Assuming that there was general dislike of the Christians for several reasons, there is still the question of what brought about the first persecution if Christianity, as such, was not illegal. That it was not illegal until at least near the end of Nero's reign is indicated by the fact that Paul did not hesitate to take his problem to Rome itself. But the tension that existed made it easy for persecution to develop. The immediate cause for this

¹Tertullian Apology, trans. T. R. Glover (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 42. 4-9.

²Tertullian Apology 7. 1.

development is usually associated with the burning of Rome.

The Fire

Because of the nature of building construction, fires were common in Rome, but on July 19, A.D. 64 a fire of immense proportions broke out and destroyed a great part of the city. Tacitus described the tragedy in detail.

There followed a disaster, whether due to chance or to the malice of the sovereign is uncertain--for each version has its sponsors--but graver and more terrible than any other which has befallen this city by the ravages of fire. It took its rise in the part of the Circus touching the Palatine and Caelian Hills; where, among the shops packed with inflammable goods, the conflagration broke out, gathered strength in the same moment and, impelled by the wind, swept the full length of the Circus. . . .¹

He adds that it was impossible to combat the flames, and many stayed to die rather than leave their business or their relatives who could not be rescued. His description of the role played by Nero shows both generosity and depravity.

Nero, who at the time was staying in Antium, did not return to the capital until the fire was nearing the house by which he had connected the Palatine with the Gardens of Maecenas. It proved impossible, however, to stop it from engulfing both the Palatine and the house and all their surroundings. Still, as a relief to the homeless and fugitive populace, he opened the Campus Martius, the buildings of Agrippa, even his own Gardens, and threw up a number of extemporized shelters to accommodate the helpless multitude. The necessities of life were brought up from Ostia and the neighbouring municipalities, and the price of grain was lowered to three sesterces. Yet his measures, popular as

¹Tacitus The Annals xv. 38.

their character might be, failed of their effect; for the report had spread that, at the very moment when Rome was aflame, he had mounted his private state, and, typifying the ills of the present by the calamities of the past, had sung the destruction of Troy.¹

Just when it appeared that the fire had exhausted itself, it broke out again, and though the loss of life was not so great, it did destroy public buildings and other places that had been built for the purpose of amusement.

The second fire produced the greater scandal of the two, as it had broken out on the Aemilian property of Tigellinus and appearances suggested that Nero was seeking the glory of founding a new capital and endowing it with his own name.²

There could be little doubt that the fire had a tremendous emotional impact upon the city because later the streets were widened to make it easier to control flames, and the water supply was increased as well as other precautions taken. But an even more pressing matter was that of appeasing the gods who had been so displeased as to permit this holocaust.

So far, the precautions taken were suggested by human prudence: now means were sought for appeasing deity, and application was made to the Sibylline books; and at the injunction of which public prayers were offered to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpine, while Nero was propitiated by the matrons, first in the Capitol, then at the nearest point of the sea-shore, where water was drawn for sprinkling the temple and image of the goddess. Ritual banquets and all-night vigils were celebrated by women in the married state. But neither human help, nor imperial munificence, nor all the modes of placating Heaven, could stifle

¹Tacitus The Annals xv. 39.

²Tacitus The Annals xv. 39.

scandal or dispel the belief that the fire had taken place by order. Therefore, to scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the State but to the ferocity of a single man.¹

The value of this report has been questioned. Ramsay points out that it is written for publication and was composed with a concern for literary effect. It was written more than fifty years after the fire, which would indicate that at the time of the fire Tacitus was young, and thus was dependent upon the evidence of others for his information.² Ramsay asserts that even if Tacitus tried he could not free himself from the experience of the fifty

¹Tacitus The Annals xv. 44.

²W. M. Ramsay, The Church in the Roman Empire Before A. D. 170 (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1903), pp. 227.

years that intervened, and that this was bound to cloud his concept of the circumstance which he is describing. However, Ramsay goes on to say that Tacitus took the greatest of care in seeking out the facts, and that he carefully compared them.

The description of the persecution by Suetonius does raise a problem. He mentions the persecution along with several other regulations that for the good of the Roman people had become permanent police rules. The entire paragraph is quoted in order to understand the way in which he presents this.

During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food; the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas before every sort of dainty was exposed for sale. Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition. He put an end to the diversions of the chariot drivers, and who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and robbing the people. The pantomimic actors and their partisans were banished from the city.¹

Ramsay says of this code:

Every other regulation which is mentioned in the list is the permanent institution of a custom, or the lasting suppression of an abuse. It would be quite inconsistent with the others to introduce in the midst of them a statement which meant only that a number of Christians were executed on the charge of causing the fire. The fair and natural interpretation of Suetonius' words is, that he considered

¹Suetonius Nero 16.

Nero to have maintained a steady prosecution of a mischievous class of persons, in virtue of his duty to maintain peace and order in the city, and to have intended that this prosecution should be permanent.¹

It would appear that a conflict exists between the reports of Tacitus and Suetonius. The first relates that the persecutions were the result of the burning of Rome. From the second it seems that the persecution was not related to a specific crime, but had become the practice of the Roman government and would continue to be for the future.

In view of the manner in which the list is composed, it is difficult to suppose that Suetonius thought of the persecution as being anything less than a permanent rule. On the other hand, the Tacitus report would lead one to believe that the persecution would be terminated as soon as those who were guilty of incendiarism were punished.

Ramsay, however, does not feel that there is so great a difference in point of view that it cannot be reconciled.² He maintains that the statement by Tacitus has been misunderstood and that Suetonius probably was familiar with the report of Tacitus. Ramsay does not feel that Suetonius has intentionally differed with Tacitus, instead, he has merely gone a step farther in his description of what had happened. Tacitus is presenting a detailed account

¹Ramsay, op. cit., pp. 230-231.

²Ibid., p. 232.

of the first act of persecution. Since his report is considerably more detailed it could easily present a slightly different impression. Tacitus is not implying that persecution did not later become a part of the permanent action of Rome. The brief statement by Suetonius is not concerned with the earlier details, but is merely stating that persecution has become a permanent administrative principle which grew out of some experience which he does not mention. This is not acceptable to Canfield, however.¹ He points out the possibility that Tacitus may well have connected two completely unrelated events, namely, the great fire in Rome and the persecution of the Christians. He insists that Tacitus stands alone in giving the fire as the cause of the persecution. He declares that other sources give another reason for the persecution that cannot be reconciled with the statement of Tacitus except with great difficulty. He would admit, however, that the best he can do is raise some doubt concerning this theory of Tacitus which has been so completely accepted by most people. It is also Canfield's contention--he differs from Ramsay at this point--that Tacitus is full of errors and that his theory that the persecution of the Christians was the result of the fire is only another example of his inadequate work.²

Even if it is agreed that the immediate cause of

¹Canfield, op. cit., p. 46.

²Ibid., p. 57.

persecution was the charge that the Christians were incendiaries, this belief was hardly sufficient reason for the intense and continued attack. Popular suspicion and dislike for the group called "Christians" must have risen to such a fever that it was believed by the Roman populace that there were adequate reasons for punishment and thus the persecution continued even after the charge of firing Rome had ceased to be an issue. Tacitus makes this point: "Vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race."¹ Fear and hatred had assumed such proportions that it was believed that for the safety of Rome and her people this movement had to be eliminated. The evangelistic concern of the cult also contributed to its problems as the Christians were not content to practice their rites much as the Jews before them had done, and leave others to themselves. Their enthusiasm caused them to spread their doctrines into the very palace of Caesar itself. This was an alarming factor, particularly to those who felt that the new cult was in danger of disturbing the accepted religion, and thus the very foundation of the Roman Empire.

It is certain that the populace accepted the initial action of persecution as just. Since antagonism toward the Christians already existed, this conviction immediately provided an outlet for the aroused emotions that had developed

¹Tacitus The Annals xv. 38.

following the fire. In some instances the persecution took the form of an exhibition which offered amusement as the victims were torn apart by dogs and wild animals in the name of a sporting spectacle.¹

As the first emotional surge wore off there developed a new evaluation of the cause of the fire. Tacitus wrote:

Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.²

There was no question among the populace that the persecution was just, but there was some feeling that Nero's reason for doing it was not his concern for the welfare of the State, but rather to satisfy his own ferocity.

One of the more confusing questions is as to whether the Christians supposedly confessed to setting the fire. Tacitus is most emphatic that they did confess.. "First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested." It is obvious that they could not have made a wholesale confession to arson; for, if they had, the populace would not have been willing to shift the responsibility for the fire from the heads of the Christians to that of Nero. It has been suggested that the Christians may have been implicated to

¹Tacitus The Annals xv. 38.

²Tacitus The Annals xv. 38.

some degree, but in addition to the judgment of the populace, recorded facts indicate that this could not possibly have been the case.¹

There is the possibility that the Christians may have been persecuted simply because they were Christians. This is the matter which Pliny mentions several decades later in his letter to Trajan: "Whether the mere profession of Christianity albeit without crimes, or only the crimes associated therewith are punishable."²

Ramsay maintains that there were two kinds of Christians at this time. One of the groups was those who openly professed their religion and who participated in the evangelizing of the movement. The other, and perhaps the larger of the two, was those who believed but did not publically profess the faith. It is possible that the latter group participated in the public acts of worship that were expected of those who were loyal to the Roman Empire and its religion.³ The acceptability of such a position became a matter of dispute within the Church.

It is certain that the spread of Christianity rested largely with those who did publically confess their faith.

¹Ramsay, op. cit., p. 238

²Pliny Letters, trans. William Melmoth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), x. 96.

³Ramsay, op. cit., p. 239.

It is difficult to believe that the movement could have grown so rapidly if it were not a matter of open conversation with at least part of the Christians. Not to be denied, however, is the thought that some of their meetings were held in secret. This could well have been the case and it is probable that many Christians participated in the meetings only when they were secretive.

There is little evidence to show how widespread the persecution became or how many it involved. Tacitus uses the term, "vast numbers," but this figure is difficult to interpret. It could imply that truly a great multitude of Christians were herded into places of execution and killed, or it might mean that a large percentage of those professing Christianity was killed. Again, it might imply that the number killed was great in relation to the questionable guilt of those accused.

The one fact that does offer light is the implication that the populace lost its enthusiasm for the slaughter. Unless it is assumed that the people of Rome were more sensitive to brutality than is generally supposed, it is probable that this sentiment could have developed only after a long and sustained persecution. A confusing element is the attitude of Tacitus, for it is clearly indicated that he did not like the Christians. To put them in a bad light was apparently a pleasure, but then, neither did he like Nero. Thus, the accuracy of his reporting on this matter is to be

questioned. He may be attempting to show Nero in the worst possible light by saying that the emperor was guilty of butchery until even the people of Rome rose up against him. Yet, it does appear that the persecution was severe, and may well have been maintained over a period of time.

As to whether merely being a Christian was adequate grounds for persecution, there is less certain evidence. By the time of Pliny it was generally accepted that the profession of Christianity was adequate grounds for persecution.¹ It does not seem that this was the case during the persecution by Nero. Tacitus definitely states that a trial and conviction were parts of the procedure. This would then imply that being a Christian was not sufficient grounds for punishment. They were instead punished for being arsonists and for being guilty of other crimes against society; namely, practices of magic, crimes against human nature such as the belief that the eucharist meal involved the killing of children and the use of their blood in the sacrament, and for tampering with the social and religious customs of the day.²

It should be pointed out, however, that Suetonius' brief comment on the cause of persecution does allow for a different interpretation. The statement, "Punishment was

¹Pliny Letters x. 96.

²Infra, p. 160.

inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition,"¹ appears to intimate that the persecution may have been based on the mere confession of being a Christian. However, as has been pointed out, it is probable that he is not dealing with the specific period of A.D. 64 to 66, but to a much broader period of time. It could well be that his statement would allow persecution for a specific crime during this earlier period, but that it also permits a changed attitude by the time he was writing. Ramsay doubts that this change could have taken place during the reign of Nero.²

Nero spent most of A.D. 67 and the first part of 68 in Greece, and it is difficult to determine whether the persecution continued during his absence. But Dio's comments concerning Helius, who had considerable authority in Rome during this time, are not flattering. "In Rome during this same period Helius committed many terrible deeds."³ Thus, there is reason to suppose that the pattern which had been instituted by Nero was continued in his absence, and this same policy may have spread into other areas of the Empire.

It is strange that the authors of the New Testament remained silent concerning this persecution, though perhaps

¹Suetonius Nero 16.

²Ramsay, op. cit., p. 243.

³Dio's Roman History lxii. 18. 2.

the Gospel writers would not be expected to deal with it inasmuch as their narratives end with the resurrection. There is, however, one passage that may have reference to it.

But take heed to yourselves; for they will deliver you up to council; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them. And the gospel must be preached to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and the children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.¹

The writers may have felt that detailed description of the persecutions would have hindered the growth of the movement. Certainly there would have been those who might have lost enthusiasm for Christianity had it been emphasized that martyrdom was one of the possible roles of the professing Christian. But it should be pointed out that many were not afraid. At least, later authors showed no hesitancy to discuss these unpleasant matters, and many of them were writing during the era of persecution.

An alternate possibility is that during the greater part of the first century the writers may have been concerned with the desire for showing Rome that there need not be any conflict between the State and Christianity. This

¹Mark 13:9-13.

could be done more successfully by ignoring persecution than by describing it. To fan the flame by recognizing the existence of persecution had little to offer, and possibly had the potential of doing great harm.

It is interesting that the problem which was to produce such chaos among certain Christian communities during the reign of Domitian was evidently not yet an issue. Any overt action against the office or position of the Emperor was considered to be treason, and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, this was an issue in the trial of Jesus.¹ However, as there is no evidence that Emperor worship was being demanded during the reign of Nero, this certainly was not an issue at the time of the first persecution. It is not known whether refusal to comply with the rites of the Roman Imperial Religion was involved as a basis for persecution. There is, of course, the possibility that noncompliance was a factor, and that this test was applied to the Christians. If this possibility could be assumed a fact, several difficult questions would be cleared up. But such an assumption is not warranted for if failure to observe rites were cause for persecution there would surely have been more evidence to that effect.

A possible reason for the lack of emphasis on emperor worship during the reign of Nero could have been his own attitude toward religion. As is pointed out by Suetonius,

¹Infra, p. 99.

the Emperor heartily disliked cults,¹ an attitude in part due to the influence of Seneca, who attached the Roman religion as well as mythology. In A.D. 65 when it was proposed in the Senate that a temple be erected to him, Nero declined. However, Grant points out this may have been because "Roman tradition provided only for the deification of dead emperors at Rome,"² rather than because of humility or lack of interest in religion. It is interesting to note that near the end of Nero's life as his empire collapsed, he turned to various superstitions, but they did little for him as he committed suicide during his thirty-second year, and according to Suetonius, on the anniversary of the murder of Octavia.³ There is no evidence to determine the number of Christians martyred during the Neronian persecution. No names are known although there is an old and quite strong tradition that Paul, and possibly Peter, suffered martyrdom at this time. Few doubt that Paul died in Rome, but there is less certainty concerning Peter's death. The letter of I Clement discusses this, although Foakes-Jackson points out that the epistle does not profess to be by Clement. It purports to be from "The Church of God which sojourneth in Rome to the Church of God which

¹Suetonius Nero 56.

²Robert M. Grant, The Sword and the Cross (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 52.

³Suetonius Nero 56.

sojourneth in Corinth." The date is indefinite, and Foakes-Jackson would set the earliest possible date as A.D. 75 and the latest as A.D. 110.¹

But, to leave the ancient examples, let us come to the heroes nearest ourselves; let us consider the noble examples of our own generation. Through jealousy and envy the greatest and holiest pillars were persecuted, and they endured to the death. Let us put before our eyes the good apostles: Peter, because of unrighteous jealousy, underwent not one or two but many sufferings, and having thus borne testimony went to his well-deserved place of glory. Because of jealousy and dissension Paul pointed out the way to the reward of endurance: Seven times he was put in chains; he was banished, stoned; he became a herald in the East and in the West and received the noble renown of his faith. He taught righteousness to the whole world, and after reaching the confines of the West, and having given testimony before rulers, passed from the world and was taken up to the Holy Place, having become the outstanding model of endurance.²

A minimum of information concerning either Peter or Paul's death is available from this passage. Certainly this is not proof that they died in Rome. The statement, "And having given testimony before rulers, passed from the world and was taken up to the Holy Place," could have reference to Rome, but Paul had also given testimony before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.³

¹F. J. Foakes-Jackson, The Life of Saint Paul (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927), p. 275.

²The Letter of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, trans. Francis X. Glimm (New York: Cima Publishing Co. 1947), 5.

³Acts 24-25.

Ignatius also makes reference to Paul's martyrdom but does not mention the place.

I know who I am and to whom I am writing. I am a condemned man; you have received mercy, I am in danger; you are safe. You are the road for those on the way to die for God. You have shared in the sacraments with Paul who was made a saint, who died a martyr, who deserved to be blessed. . . .¹

By the time of Eusebius, the tradition was well established that Peter died in Rome.

While the rule was now being strengthened by Nero, he directed his course into unholy pursuits and began to arm himself against the religion dedicated to the God of the universe Thus, then, was this man heralded above all the first fighter against God, and was raised up to slaughter the Apostles. It is recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself and that Peter also was crucified in Nero's time, and the title of 'Peter and Paul' over the cemeteries there, which has prevailed to the present day, confirms the story, and no less also does a man of the Church, named Caius,² who lived in the time of Zephyrinus, Bishop of Rome.

Origen was the first to mention that Peter was crucified head downward, presumably because he did not wish to die as Jesus had died, and Tertullian refers to the beheading of Paul, which would have been the method of execution granted to a Roman citizen.

Paul's last years are surrounded with great obscurity. There is no evidence as to whether he was tried and released, nor can the date of execution be set. The information for Paul and Peter having died on the same day,

¹Ignatius To the Ephesians, trans. Gerald Walsh (New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1947), 12.

²Eusebius Ecclesiastical History ii. 25.

June 29, in the year A.D. 67 is very scanty, and is late. The best estimate is that they were martyred between A.D. 64 and 68. Admittedly, this information seems inconclusive, but that is the extent of the evidence.

In the year following the death of Nero, chaos reigned in the capital. There is little information concerning the plight of the Christian movement during this period. Galba was murdered, and Otho, in his effort to gain support of the religiously inclined, strongly supported the festival of Isis, but in the spring of A.D. 69 he committed suicide. Vitellius next came to the throne and at first was well received. His history might have been different had the astrologers not believed him to have had a bad horoscope. This conviction caused them to post an edict stating that for the good of the Empire, it would be better if he were to die before the following October. Tension mounted and on December twentieth he was killed by the followers of Vespasian.¹

This period introduces a new aspect of the relationship between the Roman government and the Christian sect. From this point on, the tension between Rome and the Jews was to mount further. The revolt in Palestine was a heavy blow, and it suffered the fate one might have expected from the Romans. From this date there was no advantage in the Christians being identified with the Jews and probably they

¹Grant, op. cit., p. 54.

did not wish to be. By the time of the reign of Titus, accordingly Rome seemed to be sure that there was a difference between Judaism and Christianity.¹ This distinction had become obvious as the movement continued to flourish after the destruction of Jerusalem, and it must have been a source of great confusion to Rome that the center of these religious movements could be obliterated, and that, for all practical purposes, there was not even a pause in their development throughout the Empire. Tacitus expressed similar surprise that the crucifixion of Jesus did not stem the superstition that had grown up around him. Indeed, that it could actually have been a rallying point must have seemed strange.

The reigns of Vespasian and Titus apparently made little impact upon the Christian movement, for virtually no evidence is available to suggest to what extent the persecutions were carried on during this period. In fact there is no evidence of the suppression of any foreign religion.² To indicate further the unusual condition of this era, Josephus, who had at one time been involved in war against Rome, was a court favorite. The personalities of these two emperors--father and son--were very different from that of Nero. Suetonius, who seemed to be partial to both of them, had little to say except that which was good.

¹Ramsay, op. cit., p. 254.

²Grant, op. cit., p. 55.

It cannot readily be shown that any innocent person was punished save in Vespasian's absence and without his knowledge, or at any rate against his will and by misleading him. . . . Certainly he never took pleasure in the death of anyone, but even wept and sighed over those who suffered merited punishment.¹

Ramsay, in discussing this passage, points out a mutilation in the last part of the manuscript. He doubts that it has been properly restored.² Admittedly, it is difficult to believe that a Roman general, who led in the bloody wars of Judea, and before that an almost equally bloody war in Britain, would weep every time a criminal received punishment.

It is also possible that Christians were among those being punished, in which case Vespasian must have wept and sighed over them. But this statement of Suetonius lacks sufficient evidence to assure one that Vespasian did not assent to the persecution of the Christians. As it would have been strange had he reversed the policy of Nero and thus forbidden persecution, it is possible that there were sporadic cases of harassment.

From the statement of Suetonius, it appears that Vespasian did not have the brutal characteristics of Nero. Persecutions was carried out only when there were obvious cases of violation and when these violations were expressly brought to the attention of the government. Nero had

¹ Suetonius Vespasian 15.

² Ramsay, op. cit., p. 257.

apparently taken a personal interest in the attacks and had used them as a means of satisfying his own lust. If Vespasian engaged in them at all it was only when necessary to carry out what was becoming governmental policy.

The reign of Titus was brief, less than three years. He was the eldest son of Vespasian, coming to the throne during his fortieth year. Suetonius gives a description of Titus which presents an unusual picture, for it first appeared as though he might be one of the Empire's most evil rulers.

Besides cruelty, he was also suspect of riotous living, since he protracted his revels until the middle of the night with the most prodigal of his friends; likewise of unchastity because of his troops of catamites and eunuchs, and his notorious passion for Berniece, to whom it was even said that he promised marriage. He was suspected of greed as well; for it was well known that in cases which came before his father he put a price on his influence and accepted bribes. In short, people not only thought, but openly declared, that he would be a second Nero. But this reputation turned out to his advantage and gave place to the highest praise, when no fault was discovered in him, but on the contrary the highest virtues.

His banquets were pleasant rather than extravagant. He chose as his friends men whom succeeding emperors also retained as indispensable alike to themselves and to the State, and of whose services they made special use. Berniece he sent from Rome at once, against her will and against his own. Some of his most beloved paramours, although they were such skillful dancers that they later became stage favourites, he not only ceased to cherish any longer, but even to witness their public performances.

He took away nothing from any citizen. He respected other's property, if anyone ever did: in fact, he would not accept even proper and customary

presents. And yet he was second to none of his predecessors in munificence.

He was most kindly by nature. . . .¹

If this description can be accepted as accurate, it indicates that Titus would not have enjoyed persecution for persecution's sake. However, the question is, was persecution of the Christians an accepted policy by this time? It is possible that during this period this attitude had begun to be accepted, but, as will be discussed in a later chapter, evidence for this does not appear until after the reign of Titus. Certainly, there is no indication that a closely followed policy was set up during the reign of Nero. Christians may have been punished when found guilty of crimes against the State, but this treatment would have applied to non-Christians as well. This is not evidence that they were being punished merely because they were Christians.

For the most part the Church regarded the years from Nero to Domitian as favorable. It was Domitian who was the re-incarnation of Nero. Either there must have been no persecution between these two reigns, or it was so little by comparison that it seemed to the Church as though there was none. This was the period in which the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, as well as Acts, were written. The comparatively calm nature of these years may in part be responsible for the favorable attitude which the scriptures express toward the

¹Suetonius Titus 7.

Roman government.

It is difficult to judge the impact of the first persecution on the Christian movement. If it were limited to Rome, and for the most part to the reign of Nero, the Christians may still not have seen this as the beginning of an unbridgeable gap between the State and themselves, but may have viewed it as the product of the debased Nero. If it is true that both Vespasian and Titus were benevolent rulers, as the evidence indicates, and if persecution were eliminated, or nearly eliminated, they might have seen the disaster from A.D. 64 to 68 as the product not of the Roman Empire, but of Nero.

It is strange that those who wrote later were more bitter concerning the persecution than were the authors of Acts, Matthew, and Luke who wrote shortly after it occurred. An exception to this general attitude is the I Clement correspondence which may have been written about the same time as these were.¹ The persecution apparently hangs in the writer's memory with more than a trace of bitterness.

Besides these men who lived such holy lives, there was a great multitude of the elect who suffered many outrages because of jealousy and became a shining example among us. It was because of jealousy that women were paraded as Danaids and Dircae and put to death after they had suffered horrible and cruel indignities. They kept up the race of faith to the finish and, despite their physical weakness, won the prize they deserved.²

¹Foakes-Jackson, loc. cit.

²Clement The Letter of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians 6.

Did the Christians during Nero's reign feel the tension that is expressed here? Unfortunately, there is little information as to how the thinking or the planning of Christians were affected. It is likely that a great number fell away from the movement during the persecution, for this decline in numbers did occur under Domitian, and it would have been most unusual if it had not happened under Nero.

In dealing with this period, Eusebius devotes pages to quoting Josephus and discussing the disaster of the Jewish people in Jerusalem through their revolt against Rome. But the Roman-Christian conflict just before and during this period is given only scant space by comparison.

This lack of mention points out again that the Christians were strangely silent concerning this first great persecution. Their silence in itself may be significant. If it were not possible to say anything good about Rome, perhaps they felt it was better to be silent. It could be argued that this attitude was a matter of self-preservation, rather than respect. And though this argument may be sound, it should be noted that this silence in relation to Rome also existed before and after Nero's persecution, when apparently there would not have been so great a danger in one's expressing strongly felt dislike.

However, it cannot conclusively be said that a feeling of opposition failed to exist just because there is no recorded evidence that it did. But its conspicuous absence

is a matter that needs to be viewed as a part of the total picture.

Two factors still must be considered in an attempt to arrive at a clearer picture of the relationship. First is the polytheism, idolatry, and immorality of the first century Roman Empire. Even the most casual reading of Tacitus, Suetonius, Josephus, or other writers of the time brings into sharp focus the enormity of these practices within the Empire. Since these were among the sins that the Christians felt to be most offensive, one wonders if this feeling must not have had some influence on their concept of the government. It must have been difficult for them to view such an immoral institution as divine, or divinely ordained.

Yet, it should be pointed out that there is no record of Paul's attacking the government. In Acts his vehemence seems always to be cast in the direction of his Jewish persecutors. Could it be that the Christians were painfully conscious of these sins of Rome, but as long as Rome was offering protection instead of persecution it was possible to overlook even such serious wrongs?

The second factor was the apparent attitude of the Christians toward serving in Roman offices. Brief mention has been made of this attitude. Why a Christian would choose not to serve in the army is obvious for eventually he would be led to the point where he might be forced to kill. But there were other offices in the government which did not

employ violence, and which would not, as far as can be determined, involve a person in action that would have been contrary to conscience. Yet, there is no mention of anyone entering either military or governmental offices after his conversion.¹ However, it is probable that many of those who were in public office at the time of their conversion did continue to hold their positions. This retained incumbency would, in a sense, give partial approval to the activity of the government, but it would be difficult to press the point any farther than partial approval.

¹Cecil John Cadoux, The Early Church and the World (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1955), p. 114.

CHAPTER IV

THE ATTITUDE OF THE GOSPELS

The Presence of Rome in Palestine

The word "Rome," or "Romans," does not appear in the Synoptics, and only twice in the Fourth Gospel. The first instance of its appearance is in a statement credited to a council of the chief priests and the Pharisees. "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans [οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι] will come to destroy both our holy place and our nation."¹ The second appears in the form of an adverb, and is translated "in Latin," to read as follows: "Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin [Ῥωμαϊστὶ], and in Greek."²

However, even a casual reading of the New Testament makes clear that the presence of Rome is very real in the thinking and the experience of the Gospel writers. Among the evidence for this are the following passages concerning the emperors: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or

¹John 11:47b-49.

²John 19:20.

not?"¹ also: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee;"² and to the tax collectors: "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"³

As the Gospels indicate, the Jews did not share a common attitude toward Rome, and the nationalism of some of the Jews caused antagonism. The contempt in which they held the tax collectors was probably typical. It may have been a combination of the general dislike which many people have for the paying of taxes--and for those who collect them--and, in this instance, the fact that the tax collector was accepting employment with the Roman government.

Those who considered themselves to be the intellectually enlightened, such as the Sadducees, did not always share in the dislike for the State. Often they welcomed the Roman rule just as they had accepted the Greek civilization and Greek culture which the Romans had brought with them. There were ways in which many profited both politically and economically by the coming of Rome, and it would have been foolish to have done anything that might have upset the desirable position.

¹Matt. 22:17b; Mark 12:14; and Luke 20:22.

²Luke 3:1a.

³Matt. 5:46.

This acceptance, however, was not the common attitude. It is surprising that the Jews were so intolerant of Rome, because they were the recipients of some unusual and special privileges. These included the sending of their annual tax to the Temple of Jerusalem, the exemption from attending court on the Sabbath, and the exemption from compulsory military training.¹ They were also granted privileges regarding their religion that were virtually unparalleled in Roman history. That some of these privileges were removed under Tiberius and Claudius was probably because Palestine became a growing problem, Souter, remarks:

But the great mass of the people were in a state of unreasoning opposition to it (Rome). The disposition of Pilate may be advanced as an excuse for their attitude, but in general it cannot be denied that the Jews did not deserve to retain their former liberty, that they were ungrateful to the Romans for the special privileges conferred on them, and that they forgot the advantages which the powerful protection of Rome and the advancement and security of trade thus accruing brought to them. The student of history will regard the fate which came upon them in A.D. 70, and which is referred to in Luke 21:22ff., as deserved. The stiffneckedness of the Jews brought upon them a ruin which other subject-races in the Empire had escaped by a wise submission.²

A study of the Gospels presents the almost overwhelming problem of determining whether a certain idea was

¹Irving G. Roddy, Paul Before Caesar (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1936), pp. 31ff.

²Alexander Souter, "Rome, Roman," in Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, ed. James Hastings and others, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), II, 536.

Jesus' point of view, or that of the Gospel writer who expressed it as though it were Jesus'. As the study progresses, it will point out that in many instances there is no way to tell whose opinion is being thus expressed. This study is principally interested in the point of view of the Gospel writers, however, and thus will consider the viewpoint as being at least shared by them.

It has been thought that the Gospels were directed by the attitude of Jesus and that they attempted to reflect his thinking. However, this supposition is not one that can be assumed. And even if the Gospel writers attempted to express the thinking of Jesus faithfully there is no guarantee that they did. It is necessary then to try to discover Jesus' feelings concerning the State in preparation for determining the point of view of the Gospel writers.

Cullmann maintains that a duality exists concerning this matter throughout all the New Testament, and Jesus is no exception. He points out that Jesus accepted the classification of the despised tax-collectors as "collaborationists," and that they were generally classified along with sinners and prostitutes, as well as the heathen.¹ He then agrees that Jesus did accept these tax-collectors along with sinners. But the problem that arises is whether Jesus was thinking of the tax-collectors as "collaborationists," as

¹Cullmann, op. cit., p. 19.

Cullmann holds, or just as sinners. That he thought of them as sinners there is no doubt. When the "chief priests and the elders" provoked him on an occasion he said, "Truly I say to you, the tax-collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."¹ It is probable that Jesus' criticism of the tax-collectors was not because they were employed by Rome, or even because they collected the taxes, but because he thought them dishonest in the use of their office. There is reason to believe that the unpopularity of the tax-collectors with the masses was due to their being employed by Rome, but it should not arbitrarily be assumed that this was also the point of view of Jesus.

It is interesting that Cullmann does not associate Jesus with the Zealot movement. He discusses the controversial passage in which Jesus instructs his followers to buy a sword.

And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfillment." And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough."²

Cullmann asserts that there is no doubt of the authenticity

¹Matt. 21:31b.

²Luke 22:35-38.

of this passage.¹ There is little basis for disagreement but it does seem highly inconsistent with what Jesus had said on other occasions. Cullmann agrees that Jesus had no intention of bearing arms against Rome and the reason he breaks off the conversation abruptly is that he has been misunderstood by his followers, and he chooses to discuss the matter no further. Cullmann maintains that this abruptness is characteristic of the tension that exists in Jesus' attitude towards Rome, and that he is implying that the time may come when "defensive sword-bearing may become a necessity for the disciples."²

Opposing this theory are such statements as,

Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also: and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.³

It is probable that neither of these passages reveals the feelings of Jesus specifically toward the Roman government. They are dealing with problems that are of concern to Jesus, but not necessarily related to the question of the State. To attempt to use them as evidence at this point would take them out of their context.

It appears to be a wise conclusion to assume that

¹Cullmann, op. cit., p. 33.

²Loc. cit.

³Matt. 5:39b-41.

the Lucan passage is not evidence that Jesus supported the Zealot movement. It would also seem correct to say that this passage reveals nothing concerning his attitude toward Rome.

A surprising fact is the hesitancy of the Gospel writers to come into open conflict with Rome. When there is use of Roman force they make it appear that it is because of misunderstanding or because Rome is put in the position where it can do little else. An example is the manner in which the Gospels handle the trial of Jesus. Of equal interest is the much-discussed comment attributed to Jesus by each of the Synoptics: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."¹ This has, on some occasions, been understood as a non-committal answer. Yet it hardly seems that mere evasion of a trap is all that is involved.

J. Kennard Spencer points out that there is confusion concerning both the historicity and the meaning of this passage. He quotes Alfred Loisy from his L'Evangile selon Luc which states that the passage,

was doubtless conceived. . . . to prevent associating Christians with the Jewish Zealots, who had revolted against imperial rule. It is not at all certain that Jesus and his first sectarians had considered so favorably the authority of Caesar.²

¹Matt. 22:21b; Mark 12:17; and Luke 20:25.

²Spencer, op. cit., p. 3.

But as Spencer also points out, Martin Dibelius assigns the passage to the earliest and more authentic of the Gospel materials.

The matter of historicity cannot be easily or definitely proved, though it would appear that the weight of scholarship tends to recognize the probability that Jesus did say "Render to Caesar. . . ." The inclusion of this remark in the Synoptics would be possible evidence that it presented a point of view that was also consistent with the thinking of the writers. However, even the accepting of its historicity still leaves the formidable problem of accurate interpretation.

Cullmann, who holds that the Christian attitude toward the State was one of toleration rather than of respect or appreciation, points out that the "State belongs to the age which still exists even now, but which will definitely vanish as soon as the Kingdom of God comes."¹ He maintains that the "Render to Caesar" statement is in agreement with that concept. As long as the present world existed the State was willed by God, and it would not be the right of the disciples or anyone else to ignore it. In fact, they were to give the State what it needed to exist, provided that its demands did not interfere with doing that which was required of God.²

¹Cullmann, op. cit., p. 50.

²Loc. cit.

He adds that the instance in which the State did overstep its authority was at the point of emperor worship. Though the government had no right to require this, emperor worship is not a problem that face the Gospel writers to any great extent.

There is a question concerning Cullmann's approach to this statement. Evidence would lead one to the conclusion that Jesus was not a revolutionist. Payment of tribute to Caesar might not have been a particular problem for it may have appeared as only a small matter. The things that one owed to God were of much greater and more obvious significance. If one assumes that Mark was written for Roman readers some three or four decades later, this point of view could still have been apropos even though the latter found themselves in a considerably different situation than did those who heard it directly from Jesus.

A correct interpretation of Jesus' remark should be in accord with the general attitude of the Synoptics toward Rome. The position of the extremist was repudiated, and thus it does become possible for the loyal to be faithful to his Jewish faith and at the same time obey the government of Rome.¹ Some held this reconciliation to be an impossibility but Jesus' statement asserted that it could be done.

¹Gilmour MacLean, "The Gospel According to St. Luke" The Interpreter's Bible, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), VIII, 351.

Tribute to Caesar did not put God into a lesser position for it could have been maintained that ultimate control of the State still rested within his providence.

The Gospels record Jesus' coming into contact with three governments. These were the administration of Herod Antipas in Galilee, the Jewish councils which culminated in the Sanhedrin, and the Roman government which was headed locally by the procurators.¹ As far as is known there is no indication that Jesus repudiated any of the three and it is certain that he urged non-resistance: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."² "Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."³ If the government maintained a society in which these principles could be brought into practice, Jesus could have supported it, and certainly the Gospel writers could have and generally did.

The Gospels give a picture of a friendly relationship existing between Jesus and some of the men belonging to the governing classes. An example is Jesus healing the slave of the centurion.⁴ Also of interest are the remarks of the centurion at the cross as they are recorded in Mark.

¹Clarence Tucker Craig, The Beginning of Christianity (New York: Abingdon Press, 1943), p. 314.

²Matt. 5:9.

³Matt. 5:39.

⁴Luke 7:1-10.

"Truly this man was a son of God."¹ There are problems in referring to passages such as these for their historicity can be questioned. But if they were added by the Gospel writers for some purpose, certainly one of the purposes may well be, as Cadoux suggest, to attempt to prove that the relations between Rome and Christianity had been good and should continue to be so.²

Another event of this time, though only briefly alluded to in the New Testament, is the destruction of Jerusalem. Luke comments: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know desolation has come near."³ The reason for the revolt is not clear except for the fact that the Jews just did not like to be under the rule of Rome. There was no attempt to force emperor worship upon Judea, except for a brief time under the mad Caligula, and this effort was quickly given up after its complete failure.⁴ There was considerable dissatisfaction with the Roman procurators, but no procurator could have kept the Jews satisfied.⁵ Most of the leaders in Jerusalem realized the war

¹Mark 15:39.

²Cadoux, op. cit., p. 179.

³Luke 21:20.

⁴Morton Scott Enslin, Christian Beginnings, Parts I and II (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1956), p. 75.

⁵Mould, op. cit., p. 554.

could not be successful, but the hatred rose to such heat that revolt was taking place without adequate leadership. John of Gischala started a reign of terror in A.D. 66.¹ As a result, leaders in Jerusalem assumed leadership hoping to bring the war to an end with the least possible damage.

The blame for the dismal failure of the revolt could be laid to several factors. The Jews had been excused from the military by the Romans and thus were ill-trained for war and inadequately armed. They spent much of the time fighting among themselves, and, on occasions, going to the extreme of destroying their own food supplies. They also lacked a commanding motivation, such as the one in the era of the Maccabean revolution when they had fought for a great cause. Rome had been good to them and probably gave them better government than they would have had under self-rule. Vespasian let Jerusalem alone during the early years of the war, prompting many Jews to believe more strongly that the city would not be destroyed. Thus, they did little to defend against Rome, and spent their time killing each other.

Titus replaced Vespasian who had become emperor, and after five months brought Jerusalem to her knees.² By the end of the year A.D. 70 the city was completely destroyed. The Christians were obviously out of sympathy with the

¹Enslin, op. cit., p. 68.

²Theodor Mommsen, The Provinces of the Roman Empire (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), p. 215.

revolution for they had left before Titus laid seige to the city and had settled in a small Greek town in Eastjordania, called Pella.¹ The friction between the Christians and the patriotic Jews had become intense because of the withdrawal of the Christians.

The refusal of the Christians to participate in the war could have been for any one of several reasons. Perhaps there were scruples against warfare based on the teachings of Jesus, for this apparently was a genuine concern of the Christians for many years. Or perhaps they too, along with some of the Jerusalem leaders, saw the case as hopeless, and did not see any reason for getting involved in what was obviously a lost cause.

It is more likely, however, that the Christians had already seen that the gap between themselves and the Jews could not be bridged, and they had decided that the wise thing was to cast their lot with Rome. This view is reflected by the Gospel writers, and it is clear that the Christian movement did not have anything in common with the Jewish movements of that day.

Near the beginning of his Gospel, Luke represents Joseph as traveling to Bethlehem to comply with the decree of Caesar Augustus, even though his wife was pregnant and would soon deliver her first child.² Luke implies there are

¹Mould, op. cit., p. 556.

²Luke 2:1ff.

other factors involved which caused Joseph to make this trip but there is no indication that it is done with a sense of protest, or that the decree was demanding something that was not right or just. It could again be interpreted to imply that the judicious thing was to comply with the Roman regulations.

The Trial of Jesus

No part of the Gospels is as revealing concerning their attitude toward Rome as is the report of the trial of Jesus. The writings of Paul do not mention Pilate, and several decades went by before the first comment concerning him was recorded. And then the Gospels offer a considerable defense in his behalf.

The story in Matthew is opened with Judas making his move of betrayal.

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.¹

Following the meal in the upper room, the disciples and Jesus made their way to the Mount of Olives. After they had been there for a time the arrest took place.

While he was still speaking Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.²

¹Matt. 26:14-16.

²Matt. 26:47.

Matthew then relates that Jesus was taken to Caiaphas where the scribes and elders had gathered and it was here that they sought testimony against Jesus. When they could find none they were forced to produce false witnesses. The alleged damaging evidence is following Jesus' refusal to contradict these witnesses.

But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his robes, and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." Then they spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ, who is it that struck you?"¹

Matthew records that following the night trial by the Sanhedrin Jesus was bound by the chief priest and the elders, after which they counseled as to how they would bring about his death. Then he was taken to Pilate.

It is implied that Pilate was greatly impressed with Jesus, and that he did not wish to pass sentence against him. He proposed that since he normally released a prisoner at this time of the year in honor of the feast, it might be well to release Jesus. Also, at that moment, Pilate's wife sent him a note asking him to release Jesus because she had a dream concerning him. But both proposal and plea were to no avail.

¹Matt. 26:63-68.

Now the chief priests and elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified." And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified."¹

Finally Pilate consented to the crucifixion, but only after he had washed his hands as an indication that he did not approve the action that had been taken by the Jews. It is not until that point that the Roman soldiers come into the narrative. They carried out the sentence that had been passed by the mob.

Pilate's defense of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke is even more dramatic. Those accusing Jesus were for the most part referred to only as "they." The implication is that "they" were the chief priests and scribes, and perhaps others who represented the people. Pilate answered their first charge by saying that he found no crime in Jesus. When they persisted and Pilate found that Jesus was a Galilean, he sent them to Herod, who happened to be in the city. Either Herod did not wish to become involved or he found Jesus guilty of no crime, for he sent him back to Pilate. Three more times Pilate stated that he did not find Jesus guilty of anything deserving death, but he finally yielded to the demands of the crowd.

¹Matt. 27:20-23.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; and I will therefore chastise him and release him."

But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"--a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; but they shouted out, "Crucify, crucify him!" A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him." But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted.¹

Even in the description of the crucifixion, the pronoun "they" continues to be used. It was not until Jesus was on the cross that the word "soldiers" is mentioned, and at that point they offered him vinegar.

Matthew explains that Pilate knew the only reason Jesus was being tried was that those who accused him were envious.² Pilate agreed to the crucifixion because there was a riot beginning, and he was anxious to avoid this. Mark also states that Jesus was accused because the religious leaders were envious of him.³ Pilate finally agreed to the crucifixion to "satisfy the crowd."⁴ Luke does not tell

¹Luke 23:13-24.

²Matt. 27:18.

³Mark 15:10.

⁴Mark 15:15.

why Pilate thought Jesus was accused, but it does indicate that Pilate thought him to be unjustly accused. Pilate assented to the crucifixion only when "They were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed."¹

John introduces several new ideas. Pilate, when they accused Jesus, told them to judge him by their own law but they answered back, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."² When he insisted that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death the Jews cried out, "If you release this man you are not Caesar's friend: everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar."³

Suddenly and strangely, the mob, which historians assumed to have had a burning and passionate dislike for Rome, came to the defense of the State and Caesar. Pilate was forced either to assent to the crucifixion or to appear as if he were supporting some individual or movement that was actually working against Rome. Thus, it is implied that this was not truly agreement on his part, but he was put into a position in which assent became the lesser of two dangers.

Pilate caused to be placed upon the cross a titulus which read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The chief priests protested this:

¹Luke 23:23.

²John 18:31b.

³John 19:12.

Do not write, "The King of the Jews," but, "This man said, I am the King of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."¹

One of the foremost works in helping to re-interpret the trial of Jesus is The Christian-Jewish Tragedy by Conrad Moehlman. Any discussion on this subject should include careful consideration of his work.

Mention has been made of the statement by Tacitus, who, in discussing the fire in Rome and in trying to explain the role played in it by both Nero and the Christians, "Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus."² This is the earliest information available from non-Christian sources. Moehlman discusses what happened to this description of the trial and crucifixion.

Within a century after the death of Jesus the tendency emerging in the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles of exonerating Pilate from blame in the execution of Jesus had attained such proportions that Justin the Martyr could completely reverse the historical statement of Tacitus.

According to Tacitus, Pontius Pilate was the active agent of his imperial master in effecting the death of Jesus. The apologist Justin, however, changed 'by' to 'under' and thus transferred the guilt of Pilate to the Jewish people:

This very Son of God . . . was crucified under Pontius Pilate by our nation.

¹John 19:21-22.

²Tacitus The Annals xv. 44.

This was tragic, for later Christian dogmatists would quote Justin rather than the gospels. Justin the Martyr had spoken, the case was settled. And now!¹

The almost fanatical defense of Pilate takes another form in the later judgment of the Church. Moehlman refers to the following passage by Tertullian who had just completed the description of the resurrection and the ascension.

The whole story of Christ was reported to Caesar (at that time it was Tiberius) by Pilate, himself in his secret heart already a Christian. Yes, and the Caesars also would have believed in Christ, if Caesars had not been necessary for the world,² or if the Caesars, too, could have been Christians.

Moehlman also discussed a second-century fragment referred to as the Gospel of Peter, in which Pilate is absolved of all crime in the trial and crucifixion.

It contains the story of the passion of Jesus from the trial before the Roman procurator to the resurrection. This gospel was used by Jewish Christians living in Syria during the fifth century and as late as the eleventh century was still highly regarded among other Christians. This description of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus not only absolved Pilate from all guilt but lets him accept the deity of Jesus.

Herod sentenced Jesus to death. Herod has almost complete Jurisdiction since Pilate must ask him for the body of Jesus. Herod's soldiers actually crucified Jesus. Innocent Pilate alone washes his hands. Pious Pilate believes that Jesus is the Son of God. That this mutilation of history could be accomplished within a brief century after the establishment of the Christian church is a sad commentary upon the ancient Christian attitude toward facts and truth. The pertinent sentences of the fragment are quoted:

¹Moehlman, op. cit., p. 64.

²Tertullian Apology 21. 24.

. . . But not one of the Jews washed his hands (as Pilate had). Herod did not. Not one of the judges did. But when they refused to wash themselves, Pilate arose. King Herod ordered the Lord to be seized, as he said to them: "Everything that I have ordered thou to do to him do". . . .

Pilate sent to Herod and asked him for the body of the Lord. . . .¹

The crowning surprise is the position of the Ethiopic Christian Church, which on June 25 venerates Pilate and Procla, having elevated them to sainthood. It gives no explanation for this, other than the reference to the comment in Matthew that Pilate had washed his hands as an indication that he did not approve of the action that was being taken.²

Opposed to this concept is the evidences that Pilate was cruel and brutal beyond all necessity. Joseph Klausner writes:

The Judea of his day was marked by bribes, vainglorious and insolent conduct, robbery, oppression, humiliations, men often sent to death untried, and incessant and unmitigated cruelty.³

Josephus accused Pilate of cruelty almost to the degree of being inhuman. He describes one clash between him and the Jews as follows:

On a later occasion he provoked a fresh uproar by expending upon the construction of an aqueduct the

¹Moehlman, op. cit., p. 69.

²Ibid., p. 88.

³Joseph Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1946), p. 163.

the sacred treasure known as 'Corbonas'; the water was brought from a distance of four hundred furlongs. Indignant at this proceeding, the populace formed a ring round the tribunal of Pilate, then on a visit to Jerusalem and besieged him with angry clamour. He, foreseeing the tumult, had interspersed among the crowd a troop of his soldiers, armed but disguised in civilian dress, with orders not to use their swords, but to beat any rioters with cudgels. He now from his tribunal gave the agreed signal. Large numbers of the Jews perished, some from the blows which they received, others trodden to death by their companions in the ensuing flight. Cowed by the fate of the victims, the multitude was reduced to silence.¹

The necessity for removing all sense of guilt from Pilate is obvious. If the Christians were to absolve Rome from the guilt of crucifying Jesus, it was necessary to absolve Pilate, who was representing Rome. Since he had been appointed by Rome, and since he was a Roman citizen, this exoneration was more important than if he had been a local man, though a non-Jew. The extremes to which some went in venerating him are unreasonable. It can only be said that once it was started, there seemed to be no stopping place short of sainthood.

This concept could come as a surprise to those who have considered first century Christianity to have been on such a lofty ethical level that it left little room for misrepresentation either in the New Testament or in the attitudes of the people who claimed the Christian faith. But

¹ Josephus The Jewish Wars, trans, St. J. Thackeray (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), ix. 4.

such idealism would have demanded a strain on the human personality that it could not have borne, and which almost certainly did not exist. However, an equally important factor was the early Christian lack of concern for history as it is most often understood today. The actual facts were not necessarily most important in their interpretation of "history."

If this view is accepted as a probability, then there is little doubt as to the manner in which the Pilate story has been colored. In addition to the evidence of Conrad Moehlman, there is considerable agreement among other scholars that the story of the arrest, the trial, and the crucifixion is told with the intention of emphasizing the point that Rome was not responsible for the death of Jesus.

A provocative thought which should be considered is; would the Romans have been likely to discriminate between the new Messiah and other agitators? There is evidence that there were other agitators. During the period of time that Archelaus was struggling to assume control of the area, a shepherd, Athronges, whose only claim was his immense stature, was able to find enough supporters that he attempted to seize the then-empty throne of Herod.¹ Only a few years later, Judah the Galilean, started a revolt that was to lead to the disaster of Sepphoris.² Already

¹Klausner, op. cit., p. 156.

²Ibid., pp. 156-57.

mentioned was John of Gischala, who started a reign of terror in A.D. 66, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem under the armies of Titus.¹

In each instance, Rome dealt thoroughly with the agitator and the uprising. It would seem that if there were any question as to the intent of the individual or the movement, Rome preferred to eliminate them. To argue that Pilate and Rome knew that Jesus' kingdom was "not of this world," and that they were willing to make an exception in his behalf and not treat him as similar offenders were treated, is difficult to believe. C. G. Montefiore, in his commentary on Mark, has this to say concerning the trial:

We now pass from a difficult and hardly conceivable trial before the Jewish authorities to a difficult and hardly conceivable trial before Pilate. The historic residue in both cases seems to reduce itself to the bare fact. Some Jewish authorities procured the arrest of Jesus. They found some means of holding or declaring him worthy of death--some charge upon which they could secure his condemnation from Pilate. He was brought before Pilate, and Pilate condemned him to death. The first fifteen verses of Chapter xv hardly contain anything more historical than the short summary contained in these few words: brought before Pilate, he was by Pilate condemned to death.²

Stephen's death brought on feelings which were only the precursors of more intense ones that were to develop between the Jews and Christians. Saul, before his conversion,

¹Supra. p. 87.

²C. G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), pp. civ-cv.

Still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, men¹ or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.¹

But there appears to be a lack of understanding of the position of the Jews, for could they have possibly seen anything in this new movement except intense fanaticism? It was a threat to their religious and social structure; there is little wonder they opposed it.

It was only a matter of time until the break became known to Rome and this probably was recognized during the period between the fire in Rome and the destruction of Jerusalem. Since it became important for the Christians to explain the death of Jesus, since there was such an open split between the two groups, and since it is likely that some of the religious leaders of Jesus' day may have been opposed to him, it became natural, and easy for the blame to be shifted from Rome to the Jews.

The Gospel writers undoubtedly wished to ingratiate themselves with Rome in order to avoid the growing distrust with which the government had begun to view the movement. In order to achieve this, the Gospels became a combination of facts about Jesus and a series of apologetic moves, which were calculated to accomplish certain definite goals.

The understanding of the Christian movement by Rome was inaccurate. That Christians were accused of many

¹Acts 9:1-2.

criminal charges was probably mostly due to ignorance.

The zeal of the Christians lead to a misunderstanding that caused Rome to look upon them as a revolutionary group. The fact that this view was unfounded was irrelevant in a day where the burden of proof rested with the accused.

Even with the evidence that is now available, it is difficult to present a clear concept of the attitude of the Gospel writers toward Rome. True, Pilate and Rome are acquitted of responsibility for the crucifixion. But there are times when a current of anti-Roman feeling comes very close to the surface. This may be partly due to the grumbling about persecution that had already been inflicted on the Christian movement.

Yet, was there any choice in the attitude which the Christians must take if they were to survive? Certainly they were in a Roman world, and there was no reason to suppose that the situation was going to change. If Mark was a Roman Gospel, it is not likely that it could have circulated had it taken a different attitude toward the government.

Is it, then, to be assumed that the Christians compromised with fact, as well as conscience, in order to survive? Perhaps the real truth is less brutal than this. The lateness of these writings removed them from the actual events of Jesus' life. The lack of eye-witnesses could have made the trial a rather obscure event for the Gospel writers.

This, however, is not a completely satisfactory answer. It may have appeared to the writers that it was very important that Rome be assured that the Christian movement had no political ambitions. Its spiritual message was so dramatically important, and so desperately needed to be told, that missionary zeal took precedence over political fact.

Thus by the time of the writing of the Synoptics, even though the persecution of Nero lay only a few years behind, the professed sympathy and loyalty of Christianity was strongly aligned with the State. The concept of Paul was reiterated.

CHAPTER V

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Nature of Apocalyptic

The Book of Revelation is only one of many examples of apocalyptic literature. Old Testament books containing apocalyptic works are Ezekiel, Joel, Isaiah, and Daniel.

The Book of Daniel is dominated more completely by this influence than are the other Old Testament writings. It was produced at the time of the persecution by Antiochus Euphraphanes, who ruled Syria from 175 to 164 B.C., when the Jews rebelled against the Hellenistic culture that was being forced upon them.¹ The writing attempted to help the people stay loyal to their faith and culture. The last half of the book is a series of visions offering assurance that the time is near when God will reward those who have remained faithful.

One of the non-canonical apocalyptic writings was Enoch, which came from the pens of many writers.² The theme of punishment for evil-doers and of rewards for the loyal is

¹Enslin, op. cit., p. 15.

²Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, II, 163.

prevalent. It is quoted in Jude as a basis for punishment on all people who refuse to do the will of God.¹ This work might have been an influence in the writing of Revelation.

The Assumption of Moses, a first century A.D. writing,² is a sermon or address by Moses to Joshua, supposedly revealing all of history from Moses until the coming of the Messiah. It encouraged the acceptance of persecution and the keeping of the faith. It also is quoted in Jude.³ The fall of Jerusalem gave rise to the Apocalypse of Baruch and IV Esdras.⁴ The Apocalypse of Baruch would seem to have been written at the time of the first fall of Jerusalem, but generally agreement is that it was actually written following the destruction of that city in A.D. 70.⁵

Its purpose was to encourage the Jews who had suffered so greatly in the disaster.⁶ IV Esdras was written about the same time and for the same purpose, though it, too, leaves the impression that it first appeared during the Exile.

¹Jude 15.

²Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, II, 407.

³Jude 9b.

⁴Henry C. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. xxv.

⁵Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, II, 163.

⁶S. J. Case, The Revelation of John (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), p. 92.

There are examples of this type of literature in gentile writings also, the best known being the Sibylline Oracles. It is unlikely, however, that the gentile sources had much influence in the writing of Revelation.

Apocalyptic writings have several characteristics in common. Not all of the characteristics mentioned below are found in every piece of apocalyptic literature, but most of them are present to some extent in Revelation:

1. Apocalyptic literature presents a transcendentalizing of the Messianic Hope. The Messianic Hope was lifted up at a time of great oppression. It was often present to some degree but at particular periods it became a passionate obsession, holding aloft the dream of final triumph over the forces of evil. This triumph was occasionally expressed in terms of military victories, though more often it was to be brought about by a miraculous intervention on the part of God.

2. Apocalyptic literature was pessimistic about the present, but optimistic for the future. There were two ages.¹ The present one--or the first one--was the evil age, but the age to come, in which everything was to change, was to be a good one. For many of the Jews this was to be the coming of the Messiah, and for the Christians it was to be the second coming of Christ.

¹C. A. Scott, The Book of Revelation (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1905), p. 6.

3. Most of the literature was pseudonymous.¹ Occasionally there was no name attached to the writing, but if there was, it was usually not the correct name. This disguise may have been to protect the movement or the author. Sometimes a famous name was used in order that it might have greater authority.²

4. Apocalyptic writing was dominated by symbolism and abnormalities.³ This may have been a calculated effort to confuse the enemy. Those for whom it was written probably understood most of the symbolism, but it would not have been intelligible to those outside the faith.⁴ If all of the symbolism was clear to the intended reader, the key to some of it has been lost to our day.

5. The revelation did not come to the writer simply by the dint of hard work, but by a supernatural process which included at least three methods.

a. Dreams were often an influential factor in religious experiences. This method is not used in Revelation but does play a significant role in Daniel.

¹Ibid., p. 8.

²C. A. Allen, The Message of the Book of Revelation (New York-Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1939), p. 17.

³Ibid., p. 19.

⁴A. W. Burnett, The Lord Reigneth (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 23.

b. Visions were the method used in Revelation.¹ There are sometimes visions within the visions.

c. Audition was a technique used in Revelation as well as in the Baptism of Jesus,² and the conversion of Paul.³ Some of the greatest music is based on sayings which the author of Revelation heard from heaven. Examples are the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy," and Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus."

6. There was an emphasis on angelology. God spent most of his time on the throne and the angels carried out his commands. They differed both in character and size, one being so large he could stand on both the land and the sea.

7. An abundance of color and sound was a common characteristic. A number of colors and unusual combinations were used. The sound varied from roars or loud noises to the angelic choruses.

8. The concept of determinism was almost always present. God had determined how he would act and there was very little that man could do except wait.

9. Monotheism was changed to dualism and sometimes it almost became polytheism. Satan and Michael became powerful forces as did Christ in Christian literature.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 18.

²Matt. 3:17.

³Acts 9:4.

⁴Martin Kiddle, The Revelation of St. John (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1940), p. xlv.

10. The threat of a struggle was always present and was world-wide in nature, rather than local. It was the struggle between light and darkness, between good and evil, between God and Satan.

11. The strain and tension mounted to extraordinary levels. The threat of martyrdom was more than a possibility. An element of excitement and anticipation dominated the scene.

12. The idea of eating a Book appears in Revelation and other writings as a method by which one obtains knowledge.

For the most part, this literature developed during periods of great stress.¹ Just as the Roman government turned to the Sibylline Oracles during periods of crisis,² so did the Jews turn to their apocalyptic prophets. In both the Jewish and Christian examples, apocalyptic literature was usually associated with problems which were both political and religious, though they were usually intended to deal with a single situation.

An attempt to date the period which is spanned by apocalyptic writing is difficult, but most of it arose during the last two centuries B.C. and the first century A.D.³ Some that appeared earlier than this period are chapters 38

¹Scott, op. cit., p. 11.

²Case, op. cit., p. 127.

³Burnett, op. cit., p. 20.

and 39 of Ezekiel, which may have been written two centuries before this time. Other exceptions are Joel, and parts of Isaiah.

It is difficult to judge the impact which this writing made upon the people of its day. But when it is recognized that even in the present day it is a source of influence, it may be assumed that a great number of those who read it were greatly impressed. It is probable that its influence waned in days of prosperity and good fortune.

The Author and Date

The question of authorship in the Book of Revelation offers a problem. At first appearance this would seem to be one of the apocalyptic writings that is not pseudonymous. But the name "John," was so common that it leaves nearly as great a problem as if it were pseudonymous. Early tradition has associated it with the apostle John. Justin Martyr implies this:

Moreover, a man among us named John, one of Christ's Apostles, received a revelation and foretold that the followers of Christ would dwell in Jerusalem for a thousand years, and that afterwards the universal and, in short, everlasting resurrection and judgment would take place.¹

Though this was accepted by Tertullian and Origen, internal evidence creates a question. The reference to "The twelve

¹Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho, trans. Thomas B. Falls (New York; Christian Heritage, Inc., 1948), 81.

apostles of the Lamb,"¹ indicates that the author is not including himself in the group, although this reference would not be conclusive in itself. It does seem strange, however, that while he refers to himself as a prophet, he does not call himself a disciple. Surely the highest office that anyone could have claimed was to have been one of the original twelve. He probably would have stressed the fact, had he been one.

There is also the theory that John, the Apostle, was put to death by the Jews, in Palestine, or perhaps by Herod at the same time of the death of his brother James.² In either case his death would have come before the destruction of Jerusalem. Unless a very early date is chosen for the Apocalypse this would eliminate John, one of the twelve, as a possible author. However, the evidence for John's death is not conclusive, though Mark 10:39 may be a reference to it. Unless Revelation is placed very early, John the Apostle would in all likelihood have been dead even though he may not have died in Palestine as a martyr.

For some scholars the problem of authorship of the Apocalypse is related to the same problem in the Fourth Gospel. The difference in style, as well as thought, apparently rules out any probability of common authorship.³

¹Rev. 21:14.

²Arthur S. Peake, The Revelation of John (London: Joseph Johnson Primitive Methodist Publishing House, 1919), p. 52.

³Charles, The Revelation of St. John, I, xxii.

If the disciple is rejected as a possible author, and if the writer of the Fourth Gospel is eliminated, there is no evidence determining who did write it. There is little reason to believe that it was pseudonymous in the strict sense of the word, even though this remains as a possibility. Evidently, the author was familiar with the Churches in Asia and possibly was highly esteemed by them. He writes as though he had great authority over them, but this may have been because he, and consequently they, believed the real speaker was Christ and not himself.¹

In any case, it appears impossible to draw a conclusion other than that he was a Christian deeply concerned with the problem that the Churches in Asia were facing. He apparently was content to present his work to the world without insisting that the world knew who had been the creator of the book.

For this study the dating of the Apocalypse is even more important than is the authorship. Eusebius not only lends his weight to the Apostle John as author, but indicates the time in which it was written:

At this time, report has it that the Apostle and Evangelist John, who was still alive, was condemned to dwell on the Island of Patmos because of his testimony to the divine Word. At any rate, Irenaeus, when writing about the number of the name of anti-Christ given in the so-called Apocalypse of John,

¹Peake, op. cit., p. 69.

says the following about John in so many words in Book 5 of his *Against Heresies*: "But if it had been necessary to proclaim his name openly it would have been spoken by him who saw the apocalypse. For it was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation, toward the end of the reign of Domitian."¹

Such nineteenth century writers as Westcott, Lightfoot, and Hort, questioned this dating. They considered the time after Nero's death, but before the destruction of Jerusalem as a possibility. Twentieth-century scholars have, for the most part assigned it to the later date of the reign of Domitian. One of the exceptions to this is Torrey. He is insistent that the Apocalypse

. . . plainly belongs to the period in which Jews and Christians still lived together They worshipped in the temple and in the synagogues like the others, and were faithful in their observance of rites and customs of Judaism.²

He believes the reference to them as members of the Twelve Tribes of Israel³ indicates that the Christian Church is still made up exclusively of Jews.⁴ It is also his contention that the fear associated with the name "Nero," would not have existed if the book had been written more than a few years after his death.⁵

¹Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* iii. 18.

²Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 80.

³Rev. 7:3-8; 21:12.

⁴Torrey, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 87.

There is, however, considerable evidence in support of the later date. The statement of Irenaeus cannot be dismissed, though there is need for additional evidence. If the author was from Asia, there is no certainty that he would have been greatly involved in the persecutions of Nero. While it is possible that the first persecution did spread into the provinces, there is little probability that it reached the proportions in Asia that must have been attained in order to call forth Revelation.

The internal evidence implies that the Church had attained a certain development by the time of the writing.¹ While this status does not rule out an early date it would fit better into a later one. If the book has reference to the Gnostic heresies, these too, would fit better into a later period. Certainly, if the work was influenced by the Synoptics, principally Matthew, the period of Domitian, rather than Nero would be required.

In addition to those mentioned above, Charles lists three other reasons which add weight to Domitian's period. First, he feels that though the Seven Letters in their original form may date from the time of Vespasian, they still point to the later period for their editing and inclusion in the Apocalypse.² He mentions that Polycarp's letter

¹I. T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919), p. 207.

²Charles, The Revelation of St. John, I, xciv.

states the Church of Smyrna did not yet exist in the period of A.D. 60 to 64. Polycarp does not state when it was founded but the Apocalypse implies that while it was poor in wealth, it was rich in good works:

And to the angel of the Church in Smyrna write:
 "The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death."¹

It would probably have taken several years for the church to have developed this reputation for good works.

Secondly, Charles maintains that the imperial cult as it appears in Revelation was not enforced until the reign of Domitian.² As discussed earlier, the reigns of both Vespasian and Titus were such that the Christians were apparently immune from persecution.³ At least, there was no conflict that would have brought forth the bitterness that is expressed in the Apocalypse. As also mentioned, Nero did not make a demand for emperor worship.⁴ Since this plays a significant role in the writing, weighty evidence is added to a later date.

¹Rev. 2:8-11.

²Charles, The Revelation of St. John, I, xciv.

³Supra, pp. 68-71.

⁴Supra, p. 63.

As a third reason, Charles states: "The Nero-redivivus myth appears implicitly and explicitly in several forms in our text, the latest of which cannot be earlier than the age of Domitian."¹ This is in contrast to the point of view expressed by Torrey. Charles maintains that the concept of a living Nero returning from the East had been abandoned. Nero is now thought of as a demon from the abyss. His person has been fused with that of Satan and the Antichrist. Charles contends that this development of the myth belongs to the last decade of the first century.²

Peake also lends his weight to the period of Domitian:

It may be granted that the case for the date in the reign of Domitian has been sometimes overstated. But this date is probably to be accepted.³

He goes on to say that the early date

. . . does not account so well as a later date for the reference to the eighth emperor, nor for the prominence given to the worship of the emperor, nor the belief that Nero would return from the abyss, while it has no support whatever in tradition.⁴

Admittedly, the evidence is not conclusive, but the preponderance of it weighs heavily for the reign of Domitian.

Therefore, the book probably should be dated near the end of his reign. The years from A. D. 93 to 96 would be the best estimate.

¹Charles, The Revelation of St. John, I, xciv.

²Ibid., xcvi.

³Peake, op. cit., p. 96.

⁴Ibid., p. 97.

Emperor Worship

Rome stood near the peak of her power at this time. The empire stretched as far north as Scotland, as far south as the desert of Africa, as far west as the Atlantic, and as far east as the Euphrates River.¹ Rome the city may have numbered in excess of a million and a half residents, and the Empire as many as one hundred million. To control such a vast area it was necessary to construct and maintain a road system over which her large and efficient armies could move quickly.

Although Rome was near the center of the empire, control over the outlying regions was still difficult. Even with its roads the normal method of travel for armies was still by foot. The numerous languages made communication difficult. These factors combined with the empire's vast area made for lack of cohesion. "It needed the characteristic power of religion to bind men together."² The cults that had been pouring in from the east showed no promise of binding together; in fact, they compounded the problem. The worshipping of the emperor was the one force that offered some hope in this direction.

This idea did not originate with the Romans. There were long periods in the history of Egypt when emperor worship was practiced. Though not conclusively proved, it is

¹Allen, op. cit., p. 27.

²Burnett, op. cit., p. 37.

possible that emperor worship was a factor in the revolt of the Jews, led by Mattathias against Antiochus Epiphanes.¹ Since the Roman Empire lacked a catholic religious organization such as the one later supplied by the Christian Church, it was in need of a universally cohesive influence. The army marched into every land upholding the name and the standards of the emperor. It was followed by the administrative officials with their centralization in the emperor. At public games, sacrifices, and at celebrations attention was called to the magnificence of the emperor. Thus, he became the center, not only of political life, but also the social and religious experience of the subjects.

This emphasis intentionally left room for other deities. There was a willingness to accept existing religions, but they were to remain subordinate, and the subjects were expected to recognize the supremacy of the emperor. Roman rulers were accepted as divine, both before and after the establishment of the emperor cult. Dio Cassius comments concerning Julius Caesar:

And they decreed that a chariot of his should be placed on the Capitol facing the statue of Jupiter, that his statue in bronze would be mounted upon a likeness of the inhabited world, with an inscription to the effect that he was a demigod.²

When he showed himself pleased with these honours also, they accordingly voted that his golden chair

¹I Maccabees 2:19-28.

²Dio's Roman History xliii. 14. 6.

and his crown set with precious gems and overlaid with gold should be carried into the theatres in the same manner as those of the gods, and that on the occasion of the games in the Circus his chariot should be brought in. And finally they addressed him outright as Jupiter Julius and ordered a temple to be consecrated to him and to his Clemency, electing Antony as their priest like some flamen Dialis.¹

Suetonius was more critical:

But he also allowed honors to be bestowed on him which were too great for mortal man: a golden throne in the House and on the judgment seat; a chariot and litter in the procession at the circus; temples, alters, and statues beside those of the Gods; a special priest, and additional college of the Luperci, and the calling of one of the months by his name. In fact, there were no honors which he did not receive or confer at pleasure.²

Grant expresses the extent to which this worship developed:

For five years he had been worshipped in the East, now the Senate was to consecrate him in the West. Heaven had already given its decision, for Halley's comet had been visible for a week during the celebration of his funeral. He was given the name Divis ('divine'); the month of his birth was called July; a temple and a priesthood were devoted to him; and an annual day of prayer was placed in the official calendar. He was worshipped with the goddess Roma, and his Genius, or familiar spirit, was admitted to the select company of Roman gods. Oaths could be taken by this Genius.

In the deification of Caesar we see the Oriental influences which he despised entering Rome to do him honor.³

Augustus Caesar was to be granted similar honors.

His wise maneuvering which resulted in the elimination of

¹Dio's Roman History xliv. 6. 3,4.

²Suetonius Julius Caesar 76.

³Grant, op. cit., p. 34.

civil war following the assassination of Julius Caesar led him to be greeted as a saviour. However he did not willingly accept the role.

He always shrank from the title of Lord as reproachful and insulting. When the words "O just and gracious Lord!" were uttered in a farce at which he was a spectator and all the people sprang to their feet and applauded as if they were said of him, he at once checked their unseemly flattery by look and gesture, and on the following day sharply reproved them in edict. After that he would not suffer himself to be addressed by that term even by his children or his grandchildren either in jest or earnest, and he forbade them to use such flattering terms even among themselves. He did not if he could help it leave or enter the city or town except in the evening or at night, to avoid disturbing anyone by the obligations of ceremony.¹

Even though such adoration was distasteful to him he was widely worshipped in the provinces. Josephus relates in detail the building of a city and temple by Herod in honor of Augustus:

He was not content, however, to commemorate his patrons' names by palaces only; his munificence extended to the creation of whole cities. In the district of Samaria he built a town enclosed within magnificent walls twenty furlongs in length, introduced into it six-thousand colonists, and gave them allotments of highly productive land. In the center of this settlement he erected a massive temple, enclosed in ground, a furlong and a half in length, consecrated to Caesar; while he named the town itself Sebaste. The inhabitants were given a privileged constitution.

When, later on, through Caesar's bounty he received additional territory, Herod there too dedicated to him a temple of white marble near the

¹Suetonius Octavius Augustus 53.

sources of the Jordan, at a place called Paneion. At this spot a mountain rears its summit to an immense height aloft; at the base of the cliff is an opening into an overgrown cavern; within this, plunging down to an immeasurable depth, is a yawning chasm. . . .¹

It is probable that Herod's action was to ingratiate himself with the emperor. Swete mentions the competition that existed among the cities of Asia to be recognized as the leaders in Caesar worship.² Since Augustus was opposed to emperor worship it was necessary in Rome to worship the Genius of the emperor rather than the person of the emperor. According to Tacitus worship extended also to the West:

Permission to build a temple to Augustus in the colony of Tarraco was granted to the Spaniards, and a precedent set for all the provinces.³

More revealing than these statements was the superstition that arose around the birth of Augustus. It was believed that Apollo was responsible:

I have read the following story in the books of Asclepias of Mendes entitled Theologumena. When Atia had come in the middle of the night of the solemn service of Apollo, she had her litter set down in the temple and fell asleep, while the rest of the matrons also slept. On a sudden a serpent glided up to her and shortly went away. When she awoke, she purified herself, at once there appeared on her body a mark in the form and colors of a serpent, which she never could efface, and which obliged her, during the subsequent part of her life, to forego

¹ Josephus The Jewish Wars 21. 2,3.

² Swete, op. cit., p. lxxxix.

³ Tacitus The Annals i. 78.

the use of the public bath. In the tenth month after Augustus was born and was therefore regarded as the son of Apollo. Atia too, before she gave him birth, dreamed that her vitals were borne up to the stars and spread over the whole extent of the land and sea, while Octavious, his father, dreamed that the sun rose from Atia's womb.¹

In the reign of Caligula a senator, Livius Geminius, took an oath in which he swore that he had seen Drusilla, Caligula's sister, ascend to the gods. It is noteworthy that he received a handsome reward after insisting that he had witnessed the unusual event:

Indeed, a certain Livius Geminius, a senator, declared on oath, invoking destruction upon himself and his children if he spoke falsely, that he had seen her ascending to heaven and holding converse with the gods; and he called all the other gods and Panthea herself to witness. For this declaration he received a million sesterces.²

Mention has been made that Nero did not invite worship. In spite of this, Lucan insisted that when Nero reached heaven he would be given choice of the sphere in which he wished to reign:

When your watch on earth is over and you seek the stars at last, the celestial palace you prefer will welcome you, and the sky will be glad. Whether you choose to wield Jove's sceptre, or to mount the fiery chariot of Phoebus and circle earth with your moving flame-earth unterrified by the transference of the sun; every god will give place to you, and Nature will leave it to you to determine what deity you wish to be, and where to establish your universal throne. But choose not your seat either in the Northern region or where the sultry sky of the opposing South sinks down; from these quarters your light

¹Suetonius Octavius Augustus 94.

²Dio's Roman History lix. 11. 4.

would look aslant at your city of Rome. If you lean on any one part of boundless space, the axle of the sphere will be weighed down; maintain therefore the equipoise of heaven by remaining at the center of the system. May that region of the sky be bright and clear and may no clouds obstruct our view of Caesar.¹

From the reading of Lucan's writings one deduces that he became disillusioned with Nero. At the time of his death, which was brought about by having his veins opened, he no doubt felt quite different towards Nero than he did at the time of the writing of this poem.

In the instance of each of the emperors mentioned, it appears that the honor of being classified as deity was bestowed upon them. Some accepted it gladly, others reluctantly, or at least with a show of reluctance. This was not the case with Domitian:

He delighted to hear the people in the amphi-theatre shout on his feast day: "Good Fortune attend our Lord and Mistress". . . . With no less arrogance he began as follows in issuing a circular letter in the names of his procurators, "Our Master and our God bids that this be done." And so the custom arose of henceforth addressing him in no other way even in writing or in conversation.²

This would not have been disturbing to most of the population of the Roman world except that such egotism grated upon their sensitivity. But as already indicated, the empire seemed to respond joyously to the opportunity of emperor worship.

¹Lucan, trans. J. D. Duff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), i. 45.

²Suetonius Domitian 13.

Only the Jews had resisted, but they had been excused except for a brief period under the mad Caligula.

Those who worshipped many gods did not find it difficult to add to their list the name of the emperor. It was patriotic, and the enlightened could hardly have taken it seriously. Vespasian himself did not take it seriously. Yet, it was a potentially binding force in the far-flung empire. Failure to worship was more than an insult to the emperor, it was an insult to the empire, and even if it were not taken seriously, it was still an act which the loyal person should have been willing to perform.

The efficiency of Roman government had won gratitude among many of the provinces. Asia Minor had particular reasons for being grateful. The victim of numerous earthquakes, it had on several occasions been granted a remission of taxes during times of disaster.¹ Abuse in government had been eliminated as far as possible. The priests, representing the emperor, began to hold an increasingly important role in the provinces. Once the practice began of filling this office with local personnel, the competition became keen. Thus emperor worship for the most part did not need to be enforced; it was welcomed.

Domitian succeeded his older brother, Titus, as emperor, and without opposition he received from the Senate the power on September 14, A.D. 81:

¹Burnett, op. cit., p. 40.

Owing to his ambitious character, Domitian had not been given any active share in the government by either Vespasian or Titus. From the beginning of his principate he displayed autocratic tendencies, which grew continually stronger with the lapse of years. Significant of this were his numerous consulships and, in addition, his use of the censorship of the Senate. Even more emphatically does his policy come to light in the title "Lord and God," which seems to have been required after 86 A.D. from officials of his household and was used of him by contemporary writers, although he does not appear to have made official use of it himself.¹

Suetonius describes him as inventing new methods of torture with which to persecute his political enemies, and few who were accused were able satisfactorily to prove innocence. More despicable than this, was the inhumane manner in which he taunted the condemned:

His savage cruelty was not only excessive, but also cunning and sudden. . . .

To abuse men's patience the more insolently, he never pronounced an unusually dreadful sentence without a preliminary declaration of clemency, so that there came to be no more certain indication of a cruel death than the leniency of his preamble. He had brought some men charged with treason into the senate, and when he had introduced the matter by saying that he would find out that day how dear he was to the members, he had no difficulty in causing them to be condemned to suffer the ancient method of punishment. Then appalled of the cruelty of the penalty, he interposed a veto, to lessen the odium, in these words (for it will be of interest to know his exact language): "Allow me, Fathers of the senate, to prevail on you by your love for me to grant a favour which I know shall obtain with difficulty, namely that you allow the condemned free choice of the manner of their death; for thus you will spare your own eyes and all men will know that I was present at the meeting of the senate."²

¹Arthur Boak, A History of Rome to 565 A.D. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1943), p. 307.

²Suetonius Domitian 11.

Clement of Rome indicates that Domitian did not hesitate to execute members of his own family. The emperor's cousin, Flavius, died because he did not hesitate to refute Domitian's claim to deification, and his niece, Domitilla, was exiled because of her sympathetic leanings toward Christianity.¹

But it would be erroneous to think of him as a complete tyrant for he relaxed the taxes and his legislation was colored with both Roman morality and severity.² His administration was largely free of bribery and he placed men of integrity and ability in key positions. As a result, the empire, particularly the provinces, operated efficiently and with a semblance of honesty under his rule. His land reforms were of particular value to the small farmers, and many of those who before had been tenants became landowners. He was not enthusiastic about expansion but attempts at revolt were put down with the usual Roman efficiency.

His suppression of the Senate was strangely inconsistent with other acts which were benevolent. It is possible that his lack of opportunity to exert his prowess during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus caused him to come to the throne embittered. His popularity with the masses enabled him to survive in spite of the split with the Senate. The

¹Edward Gibbons, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1901), p. 25.

²Boak, op. cit., p. 308.

army remained loyal because of his generous increase in their wages.¹ He entertained the populace with a lavish display of games,² and by the building of elaborate buildings and temples.³

His attacks were especially vicious against the noble class,⁴ and at the slightest charge he would destroy them and confiscate their property which he used to liquidate the debts created by his own interests. There is little indication that a wide-spread persecution against the poorer class took place in Rome, but Dio states that in the case of the death of Flavius Clemens, and in the banishment of Domitilla, and in many other cases of those who were either killed or banished, or whose property was confiscated, "The charge brought against them both was that of atheism, a charge on which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned."⁵ Even though the charge was related to the matter of religion, it may be supposed that in many instances the real concern was the estate of his victims. If he did carry out a systematic persecution of the Christians in Rome there is no information concerning the names or numbers of the victims.

¹Suetonius Domitian 7.

²Suetonius Domitian 4.

³Suetonius Domitian 5.

⁴Samuel Dill, Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), p. 51.

⁵Dio's Roman History lxxvii. 14. 1.

Clement alludes to possible persecution indirectly:

Dear brothers, because of the sudden misfortunes and calamities which have fallen upon us, one after another, we have been, we confess, somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the matters in dispute, and especially to the abominable and unholy schism, among you.¹

While the evidence for associating this statement with the Domitian persecution is not overwhelming, most scholars agree that it pertains to that time.²

Lactantius comments directly concerning the persecution:

After an interval of some years from the death of Nero, there arose another tyrant no less wicked (Domitian), who, although his government was exceedingly odious, for a very long time oppressed his subjects, and reigned in security, until at length he stretched forth his impious hands against the Lord. Having been instigated by evil demons to persecute the righteous people, he was then delivered into the power of his enemies, and suffered due punishment.³

Apparently the implication is that this persecution was as vicious as the one under Nero. However, there is no indication of who it involved nor mention of an actual number, nor the place in which the persecution was centered. Eusebius, in commenting on this persecution, emphasized the fact that the noble class of Rome fell victims to Domitian's lust in great numbers, but while he mentions that the Christians

¹Clement The Letter of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians 1. 1.

²Swete, op. cit., p. lxxxv.

³Lactantius On The Manner in Which the Persecutors Died, -ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 3.

also ultimately became victims he adds this as if it were an afterthought:

When Domitian had given many proofs of his great cruelty and had put to death without any reasonable trial no small number of men distinguished at Rome by family and career, and had punished without a cause myriads of other notable men by banishment and confiscation of their property he finally showed himself the successor of Nero's campaign of hostility to God.... He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father Vespasian, had planned no evil against us.¹

The development of the Christian movement in Rome must have been considerable by this time. It is interesting that Lightfoot suggests that the Flavian household may have been the stronghold of Christianity in that city.²

The persecution in Asia Minor, where the imperial cult had thrived most successfully, must have been a different matter. A high degree of patriotism had also developed.³ Thus the stage was set for the clash that was to develop against the Christian movement. The Christian would not participate in the Imperial Religion and by his refusal he was being disloyal to the State. The Christians may have been put to the test of worshipping before the image of the emperor. If so, this apparently is the first time that they were put to a test. Evidently, the degree to which the requirements of emperor worship were enforced was largely

¹Eusebius Ecclesiastical History iii. 17.

²J. B. Lightfoot, St. Clement of Rome (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), pp. 260-61.

³B. J. Kidd, A History of the Church to A.D. 461, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1922), I, 75.

dependent upon the local rulers, and it is not clear why they should have been more enthusiastically enforced in Asia Minor than in other places. Canfield remarks:

It is likely that this test would be applied more rigorously in Asia Minor than elsewhere, since this was the very center of all ecstatic religions, and the worship of the emperor was the one thing which held their worshippers together.¹

It is also suggested that the Christians were better established and thus better known in Asia Minor than they were elsewhere. This being the case, they would have been more apt to become the targets of persecution than those Christians whose faith was less a matter of public knowledge.

It might be assumed, then, that the persecution was more severe in Asia Minor than it was in any other part of the empire, but only the Apocalypse offers information as to the extent of its severity. Its reliability regarding this matter must be questioned.

The author states his situation:

I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.²

Patmos is a volcanic and barren island of the Sporades group some thirty-five miles off the coast of Asia Minor. It is about ten miles in length and six miles wide at its

¹Canfield, op. cit., p. 83.

²Rev. 1:9.

greatest breadth, and rises to approximately eight hundred feet. Some of the first settlers were Ionians, but the island is seldom mentioned in antiquity.¹ It was probably used for criminals because it was virtually escape-proof. In spite of its diminutive measurements--only twenty-two square miles of area--it was well enough known that Pliny listed it as one of the islands of the Southern Aegean.²

If John actually had been banished to Patmos, he would have had problems concerning time and opportunity, materials with which to write, and method by which he smuggled the manuscript to the mainland. Overcoming such difficulties would have been a miraculous feat.

Interpretation

The first chapter indicates the destination of the book:

Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.³

He must have felt a particular interest in these seven churches, since they were specifically named. Possibly they were the ones that were carrying the brunt of the persecution, or perhaps he was better known in these cities. But

¹Encyclopedia Britannica op. cit., XVII, 380.

²Pliny Natural History, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), iv. 12.

³Rev. 1:11.

after the first three chapters there is little reference to the limited area of these Churches, for he no doubt hoped that his writings would reach a wider group of readers.

If the persecution was localized, and not of long duration, how can the bitterness of the author be explained? He offers no hope and no forgiveness for those who have brought about this crime against the select of God. Utter and complete destruction is their lot, and delay in their destruction is of great concern to him.

In dealing with the crisis faced by the Christians, he offers them what at first appears to be poor comfort. The immediate future held few promises. He is more alarmed over worldly interests, which could lead the Christians into eternal punishment, than he is with the immediate but only temporary persecution. Nearly the first half of the book is given to the discussion and condemnation of these practices. Over all this there hovers his concern that no one surrender to emperor worship in order to save his life. The author admitted that those who had been persecuted were only a few compared to those who were to suffer, and he must have feared that Christianity was in danger of collapsing under the heel of Rome.

The crisis may have been no less grave than John implied, for the Christians could not have offered physical resistance. Such an effort would have been more feeble than the Jews' attempt, and the memory of the destruction of

Jerusalem must still have been vivid. Neither was escape a possibility.¹ The boundaries of the Roman Empire extended far beyond any distance to which they might have fled.

Thus, there was no course left except to face the consequences, so the Apocalypse urged loyalty even though everyone knew what the price would be. Two methods were used in the attempt to keep the people faithful: first, there was the promise of a fantastic paradise to those who stood the test; second, there was the threat of destruction and brutal punishment both for those who were responsible for the persecution and those who gave up their faith in the face of the threat.

The first chapter of the book contains the form for beginning a letter.² The writing in its entirety is an epistle and was intended as such. The choosing of exactly seven Churches may be related to the significance of "seven," considered in Judaism as well as in apocalyptic writings as a holy number. The association of seven spirits and seven archangels is used to correspond with the chosen number of churches. It is uncertain whether the archangels and the spirits are intended to be identical. Clarification of such matters does not appear to be of first concern to the author, or perhaps those to whom he was writing understood without clarification.

¹Bennett, op. cit., p. 43.

²Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 8.

Chapters two and three comprise the letters to the Seven Churches, and even though the spiritual character of each Church was described, it is certain that John's greater interest was with the circumstances of the Christian Church as a whole.¹ There is evidence of conflict between two forces in these letters. Rewards are promised to those who stay loyal to their religion even unto death. "To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."² The possibility of martyrdom is recognized, but to those who are forced to endure it there is the assurance of glorious immortality.³ Even in the midst of such catastrophic action, the author took time to deal with the more practical aspects of the churches. To the church in Thyatira he wrote:

But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.⁴

But the theme is dominated by the more somber note of impending disaster. "Be faithful unto death,"⁵ reflects the extent of the grim situation.

¹Ibid., p. 37.

²Rev. 2:7b.

³Martin Rist, "Introduction, The Revelation of St. John the Divine," The Interpreter's Bible, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1957), XII. 362.

⁴Rev. 2:20.

⁵Rev. 2:10b.

The seven letters have similar structure, for in each the opening phrase recalls something of the vision in the first chapter. Next it is made clear that God is aware of the spiritual condition of the church, and appropriate comment is given in relation to these conditions. This is followed by an attractive promise to those who rightly respond.¹ It must have been obvious to the readers that it was Rome which was the oppressor, even though but little attempt is made in the first three chapters to make this fact clear.

Chapters four and five are similar in their intent. In four the scene is the throne of God, with the heavenly court surrounding the throne, and there is nothing to remind one of the tragedy on earth where men are under the control of Satan.² The purpose of this scene is to impress upon the Christian readers the truth that God is still on the throne, and that ultimately he is in control of the situation. The sudden shift of scene from earth to the splendors of heaven offers a dramatic contrast. The only question is the thought that heaven might be so far removed that it is not capable of giving aid. This fear is met in chapter five, for Christ through his death has unlocked the secret of God's hidden purpose, and he puts into motion the action

¹Burnett, op. cit., p. 48.

²Rist, op. cit., p. 362.

that is to save his people.¹ Only about him can it be said: "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals."²

Chapter six tells of the opening of the seals, and calamity follows calamity. The breaking of the fifth seal reveals the intensity of the hatred which the author harbored for Rome. "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth."³ It also notes that those who are victims of the persecution do not wait in Hades for judgment, but go to a select position near the throne of God. This prospect was, no doubt, a calculated attempt to encourage Christians to accept martyrdom rather than to surrender to emperor worship.⁴ The next chapter expands the theme. The faithful have already been sealed, and though the prophecy will not protect them from the coming physical martyrdom, it does even now assure them of the glorious status in the Kingdom which is soon to come.⁵

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.⁶

¹Kiddle, op. cit., p. 67.

²Rev. 5:9a.

³Rev. 6:10.

⁴Rist, op. cit., p. 362

⁵Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 189.

⁶Rev. 7:17.

The breaking of the seventh seal gives the author an opportunity for dramatic effect as he announces a silence in heaven which lasts for half an hour. The seventh seal creates the setting for seven more woes, each of them announced by a trumpet. This action is described in chapters eight and nine with the exception of the blowing of the seventh trumpet, which is not related until chapter eleven. The first four woes are cosmic in scope.¹ This may suggest that the conflict has now spread farther than the confines of the earth, and that the battle has begun to rage between the forces of good and evil in heaven. Strangely, in spite of the terrible result of the earthly conflict, those who survive still do not repent.² Thus, punishment for them will be in accord with their greater sin. It is not clear why he repeats the series of woes, though it was obviously for some purpose other than emphasis. Possibly these series were originally separate oracles which he tied together.³

Chapter ten and the first part of eleven interrupts the trumpet series. Ten is divided into two parts, the first being the description of the gigantic angel who assures that "there should be no more delay."⁴ The latter part describes the eating of the book. It tasted sweet in

¹Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 218.

²Rev. 9:20.

³Burnett, op. cit., p. 76.

⁴Rev. 10:6..

his mouth which probably referred to the impending conflict which would free the Christians from their persecution, and it was bitter in his stomach, which may have signified the awful punishment of Rome and those who were guilty of persecuting the Church.¹ The first part of eleven is a digression. Charles feels its inclusion at this time may be "a tribute to the older form of the Antichrist tradition (before A.D. 70), which regarded Jerusalem as the scene of the manifestation of the Jewish Antichrist."² The names of the two heavenly martyrs are not given, but probably there is reference to Elijah and Moses. The author also introduces the time period of forty-two months which plays a dominant role. The chapter then closes with the blowing of the seventh trumpet. "The Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."³ This probably meant that the time was not long until God would step in, take command of the situation, and destroy Rome.

Chapter twelve clarifies that which had been alluded to earlier as it becomes clear that the entire conflict is basically a cosmic struggle.⁴ A heavenly woman prepares to give birth to her child but a seven-headed dragon, Satan, is waiting to devour it. The child is carried to the throne

¹Rist, op. cit., p. 363.

²Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 270.

³Rev. 11:15b.

⁴Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 298.

of God and protected--undoubtedly a reference to the birth of Jesus.¹ Near the end of the chapter the woman represents the Church, a change of symbolism which is often confusing. Satan then goes off to make war on the Christians, having as his chief agent in this world the Roman Empire. The story is interrupted as the composer describes the war in heaven which pitted Michael against the dragon, and the subsequent defeat of the dragon.

Any doubt as to who constitutes the evil force, is dispelled in chapter thirteen. Satan, having been defeated and cast down, recruits two beasts to help him in his battle against the Church. The first is the emperor and the second is the priesthood of his cult.² The emperors are alluded to, with special mention of the one who "seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed."³ There is little doubt that this is a reference to the Nero redivivus myth.⁴ It was well known in the Roman world, and it lent itself beautifully to the concept which the author was expounding. The presence of the myth in non-Christian circles would have, in the minds of the Christians, added to the credibility of this diabolic scheme of Satan.

¹Beckwith, op. cit., p. 613.

²Charles, The Revelation of St. John, p. 333.

³Rev. 13:7a.

⁴Rist, op. cit., p. 363.

Chapter fourteen introduces little that is new, but it is more dramatic in its presentation than the previous chapters. Those who worship God are to be rewarded and those who worship Satan are to be tormented for ever. The first angel speaks of the rewards.

Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water.¹

The second and third angels speak of those who will be doomed:

Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion."

And another angel, a third, followed, saying with a loud voice, "if any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest, day and night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."²

Divine punishment is depicted by the harvester who uses the sickle and by the great winepress of the wrath of God. In this chapter Rome is referred to under the name of Babylon, and few Christians would have had difficulty in understanding this symbolism.

The last of the series of seven plagues is introduced in chapter fifteen. But why are these to be the last?

¹Rev. 14:7b.

²Rev. 14:8-11.

Until Rome is destroyed would it not be expected that God's wrath would continue to pour out? Swete remarks that this prophecy

can only be taken in a limited sense, as meaning that there will be no more similar displays of God's righteous displeasure against human sin; there may be reserves of wrath, but its cosmic effects will cease.¹

Also, all those who had suffered martyrdom are pictured as standing beside a sea of glass, and they sing a new song of Moses and the Lamb.

The bowls of the wrath of God are emptied in the next chapter. The first three disasters are similar to those produced by Moses, while the seventh foretells of the coming destruction of Rome. Significant drama is lent to this plague as a great voice from the throne announces: "It is done."² Mention is made of an earthquake that is greater than any before. It would be much more severe than anything they knew about even though earthquakes were common in that area.³ There is never the suggestion that the Christians are to assume a part of the role in the destruction of the Roman powers, for this downfall is to be left in the hands of God. He will use methods that are much more effective than anything the Christians could conjure.

In the seventeenth chapter Rome is given a new name;

¹Swete, op. cit., p. 193.

²Rev. 16:17b.

³Swete, op. cit., p. 210.

she is called the harlot. The scarlet beast upon which she rides probably is a reference to the "ostentatious magnificance of the Empire."¹ The suggestion that the harlot may also signify Roma, the goddess who was the divine personification of Rome and the empire, is an interesting possibility.²

The next chapter is occupied with the dirge over Babylon. The vindictiveness of the Seer reaches new heights as he pronounces the destruction which is imminent. This is graphically described by reference to the horrible silence in the doomed city:

And the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more; and a craftsman of any craft shall be found in thee no more; and the sound of the millstone shall be heard in thee no more;³

The nineteenth chapter brings shouts of joy, for the day of triumph over wrong has dawned. "It is not a Lamb that the prophet sees in his vision: the Lamb has been the symbol for the Redeemer of men, but now Christ appears as a warrior prince."⁴ From this point on, the sequence of events is confusing, but Swete points out that "in the Apocalypse priority in the order of sequence does not always imply priority in time."⁵ The human followers of Rome are

¹Ibid., p. 215.

²Rist, op. cit., p. 364.

³Rev. 18:22.

⁴Kiddle, op. cit., p. 384.

⁵Swete, op. cit., p. 256.

killed by the sword which extends from the mouth of Christ, but the conquering of the beast, who has arrayed himself in battle against the Christ, is completed by an angel. This makes possible the millennium, for Satan was bound and thrown into the pit.

Those who had been martyred for their faith were restored and reigned with Christ for the thousand years, but those who died a natural death did not come to life during this era. A plea for martyrdom is made: "Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and Christ."¹ At the end of the millennium Satan is released, but only for a short time. Defeat comes again and the beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented forever. Thus ends the cruel and evil era of Satan and of Rome, and her emperors. The book ends with an attempt to make martyrdom with its future promises more alluring than the physical safety which could temporarily be acquired through emperor worship.

Cullmann comments on the Apocalypse:

In the Johannine Apocalypse the problem of the State is quite clear and unequivocal. The complexity we found with Jesus and Paul does not exist here. . . in the Johannine Apocalypse attention is centered on that other aspect, where it frees itself from the "order" and becomes a Satanic power.²

¹Rev. 20:6a.

²Cullmann, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

The author of the Apocalypse clearly understood Rome to be the tool by which Satan worked his evil, and supposedly, Rome gladly lent herself for this purpose. There is no hint that Rome may repent, or that there is any alternative from absolute annihilation for her and her subjects. They have clearly aligned themselves against God and it is a fight till one is destroyed, and though the outcome is never in doubt, that certainty does not alter the fact that events must run their full course.

However, it is difficult to agree with Cullmann that this attitude in general is also the point of view held by Jesus and Paul.¹ Nor is it easier to believe that the Apocalypse offers support for such an interpretation of Jesus and Paul.² The attitude of Jesus and Paul appear to be unrelated and totally different from the Apocalypse, as well as there being a difference in the problems with which they deal. While it cannot be denied that both Paul and Jesus died at the hands of Rome, during their ministry they apparently felt little antagonism toward her.

The particular situation which called forth the bitterness of the Apocalypse was the demand for emperor worship. This not only dominates the book, but may well have been the total cause for the hatred. It must be recognized that this

¹Ibid., p. 71.

²Ibid., p. 72.

was not a pressing problem during the lifetime of either Jesus or Paul. There may have been other practices of the State which were distasteful, and even detrimental to the Christians' cause, but if either Jesus or Paul felt toward Rome as does the Apocalypse they remained strangely silent about it.

While the position of the book cannot be disputed, there is still question as to whether it was expressing a widely-held point of view. It can be assumed that John was banished and probably suffered the torture accompanying such punishment. At Pergamum his friend, Antipas, had been killed.¹ But other than this incident there is no evidence for the extent of the persecution. Tertullian has written:

Domitian, too, somewhat of a Nero in cruelty, made some attempts. But. . . being also, to a certain degree, human--he soon put a halt to what he had initiated and even recalled those whom he had exiled. Such have always been our persecutors, unjust, wicked, depraved men whom you yourselves are accustomed to condemn, while you have regularly recalled those whom they have condemned.²

Tertullian does not hesitate to condemn Rome for her atrocities, but he apparently makes clear that Domitian did not belong in the class of Nero; thus obviously contradicting the Apocalypse. Of course, Revelation was admittedly a prophecy, and possibly this work is more speculation than history. The author was correct in defining the potential

¹Rev. 2:13.

²Tertullian Apology 5. 4.

danger of the situation, though it appears that something intervened to keep it from reaching the proportions that he feared.

It is possible that the proconsul of Asia or the local priests pursued the demand for emperor worship with greater vigor than was expected of them. If this did happen, considerable havoc could have been wreaked before a clearer understanding would have reached them from Rome. Tertullian's statement seems to indicate that Domitian put a stop to the damage himself, but this conclusion is questionable. If he was so persistent--as evidently no other emperor had been--in demanding worship, why would he have forbidden the enforcement of it? To have spared the Christians would hardly have been a calculated move to enhance his position in Rome. There is nothing to suggest that the Christians were more popular then than they had been during Nero's reign when the populace took delight in their execution. And as their number grew they would have been viewed with even greater concern. Ignatius, writing during the first quarter of the second century, indicates that the Ephesians Church had grown fairly large.

The Apocalypse's criticism of the seven churches indicates that all was not moving well with the Church of Asia. Swete suggests that the Nicolaitan group may have been the "Pauline" Christians,¹ and they were offering considerable

¹Swete, op. cit., p. lxxii.

concern to the writer. Thus, not all of his disappointment and bitterness was directed toward Rome. Yet, the most powerful segment of the Christian Church during Domitian's reign was concentrated in Asia. It is doubtful whether it had yet developed to the point that it was a threat to the pagan religion, although this is possible. If it had, persecution is more understandable. Asia, as the center of emperor worship, might have been more sensitive to the intrusion of an outside cult, and the fear of other cults was based on more than the resentment of a religious principle; it had significant economic overtones.¹ This fact had been illustrated as early as the days of Paul in Ephesus:

About that time there arose no little stir concerning the way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together with the workmen of like occupation and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only at Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods, And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may count for nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."²

What was true in Ephesus was equally true in each of the cities of Asia. Pergamum was particularly related to

¹Ibid., p. lxxvii.

²Acts 19:23-27.

Asklepios.¹ To compound the danger, the Christians were not willing to live and let live as had usually been the attitude of the Jews. Instead, the Christians often became active crusaders against paganism, their attack being against more than religion, though the Christians may not have realized it. It tended to destroy the profession of those who worked in woods and metals, and to upset the social structure of the entire community. In many instances the local populace must have been looking for an excuse to attack Christianity and did so with only the slightest provocation. Thus, in many instances it may have been a local problem rather than one which had its roots in Rome. It was unfortunate for the Christians that the action of Domitian lent itself so well to the desire for persecution which was perhaps already burning within the thinking of local priests, artisans, and political leaders.

The bitterness of the Apocalypse is not reflected in any other Christian writing of its time. Grant even suggests that Asia may have read the book without particular approval.² The previously mentioned statement by Clement of Rome, which refers to calamities one after another, is one of a few possible current references to a persecution. Some scholars suggest that the Gospel of John was written to

¹Swete, Loc. cit.

²Grant, op. cit., p. 57.

counteract the influence of the Apocalypse and that the gospel maintains that God granted to Rome its authority.¹ However, there are too many problems, including the one of dating the Fourth Gospel, to pursue this theory. Irenaeus in his reference to the Apocalypse indicated that it had done considerable harm to the Christian cause.

It is hard to believe that many Christians could have been enthusiastic about the writing. Yet, its presence in the canon indicates a wide circulation and a certain respect and appreciation for it, though its inclusion in the canon did not take place without opposition and the acceptance came late. In viewing the situation only a few years after the book was written, it might well have seemed that the appearance of the Apocalypse was a mistake. If it came to the attention of Rome it could only have had a negative effect, but the writer did not anticipate this possibility and his time schedule did not allow for it.

The vindictiveness of the composer is oddly inconsistent with Jesus' concept of forgiveness, and yet his bitterness must have been shared not only by many Christians but also by intelligent Romans. An egotism which demanded worship was surely distasteful. Many of the Roman emperors were more just than might have been expected, but there were also depraved ones. Caligula, Nero, and Domitian had been

¹Loc. cit.

particularly cruel. The Christian cult had felt the heel of Rome during the reign of two of these emperors. Perhaps there were to be others. Certainly the worst was not yet over with the death of Domitian, and Christianity must have despised those men who used their place of power to create such pain and sorrow. But there is still considerable doubt as to whether the Apocalypse is typical of the Christian viewpoint of the Roman Empire.

Domitian was slain on September 18 in the year A.D. 96 in the forty-fifth year of his life and the fifteenth year of his reign.¹ The conspiracy was planned by those outside his household but it was greatly abetted by Stephanus, Domitilla's steward, who was under suspicion for embezzlement. Suetonius tells that the common people received the news of his death with indifference, the soldiers were deeply grieved, and only the senators greeted the news with overwhelming joy.² They passed a decree that all records of him in any form should be obliterated. Thus, there came to an end the reign of one of Rome's most controversial emperors.

¹Suetonius Domitian 17.

²Suetonius Domitian 23.

CHAPTER VI

PLINY AND I PETER

The Times and Writings of Pliny

The assassination of Domitian brought Rome to the brink of civil war, for he had no heir. Nerva, an elderly senator who was the popular choice, finally acceded to the throne without a great struggle. His chief disadvantage was a lack of familiarity with the military which had been Domitian's strongest supporter. This unfortunate situation was partially counterbalanced by his popularity with the senatorial group, and he immediately strengthened their favor by declaring that no senator should be put to death.¹

Nerva showed benevolent characteristics which had been noticeably lacking under the reign of his predecessor. Dio wrote of him:

He also forbade the making of gold or silver statues in his honour. To those who had been deprived of their property without cause under Domitian he gave back all that was still to be found in the imperial treasury. To the very poor Romans he granted allotments of land worth 60,000,000 sesterces, putting some senators in charge of their purchase and distribution. When he ran short of funds, he sold much wearing apparel and vessels of silver and gold, besides furniture, both his own and that which belonged

¹Boak, op. cit., p. 314.

to the imperial residence, and many estates and houses--in fact everything except what was indispensable.¹

He showed a remarkable willingness to forgive, even extending his clemency to those who had plotted against his life. However, the army still rumbled over the murder of their favored Domitian. In spite of his generosity to the troops it became evident that he could not long control them. The aging, childless ruler adopted as his son, Trajan, a soldier who was at the time in command in Germany. The Senate granted to Trajan the title of Caesar and this appointment managed to quell any violent outbreak that might have been in the making.² On January 25, A.D. 98 Nerva died a natural death in Rome. Considering the temper of the army, this in itself was a significant accomplishment.

Based on the kindly disposition of Nerva and the lack of evidence to the contrary, it may be assumed that the Christians were granted an opportunity to live unmolested, for the most part, during this brief period. His refusal to allow statues of gold and silver to be made in his image would have reduced, if not eliminated, the problem of emperor worship with which the Christians had been faced for the last decade.

Trajan succeeded to the throne without incident despite the fact that he was not an Italian. His first acts

¹Dio's Roman History lxviii. 2. 1.

²Dio's Roman History lxviii. 3. 4.

indicated a generous attitude which persisted throughout his reign. Dio remarks:

When he became emperor, he sent a letter to the senate, written with his own hand, in which he declared, among other things, that he would not slay nor disfranchise any good man; and confirmed this by oath not only at the time but also later.¹

Trajan was most conspicuous for his justice, for his bravery, and for the simplicity of his habits. He was strong in body, being in his forty-second year when he began to rule, so that in every enterprise he toiled almost as much as the others; and his mental powers were at their highest, so that he had neither the recklessness of youth nor the sluggishness of old age. He did not envy nor slay any one, but honoured and exalted all good men without exception, and hence he neither feared nor hated any one of them. To slanderers he paid very little heed and he was no slave to anger.²

There was no doubt, even from the beginning, that he was firmly in control of the situation. The praetorian guard became subservient and those who had been guilty of maladministration were brought to trial. His rejection of any claims of deification was comforting to the Christians.

He inaugurated several new programs which included aid for poor children and low interest loans to landowners.³ These programs may have been set up partially as an attempt to reverse the declining birthrate of Italy, though his benevolence was not limited to that country alone. Roads were repaired and new ones built to offer better communication

¹Dio's Roman History lxviii. 5. 2.

²Dio's Roman History lxviii. 15. 3-4.

³Boak, op. cit., p. 315.

with the provinces that he might more capably deal with their problems. He personally engaged in war, and the activities of war cut heavily into his time, but he still successfully carried out the responsibilities of the domestic government. Ramsay speaks of him as the "Most clear-sighted administrator that ever wielded the power bequeathed by Augustus."¹ Later generations considered him to be the model emperor. He died August 9, A.D. 117 while making preparations for a campaign in Mesopotamia.² His death brought to an end approximately twenty years of good and benevolent leadership.

Pliny the Younger, whose name before being adopted was Publius Caecilius Secundus, was descended from a respected family who had lived in Como since the first Caesar.³ He was born about A.D. 61 or 62. His father, who held a high public office at the time, died while Pliny was still a boy, but it was Pliny's good fortune to have his uncle as guardian. He later was adopted, took his uncle's name, and inherited his uncle's fortune when the elder Pliny died in the eruption of Vesuvius. His uncle was a tireless worker of great genius and reputation. He guided well the education of his nephew which was completed in Rome where he studied rhetoric under Quintilian. Pliny was only nineteen

¹Ramsay, op. cit., p. 197.

²Dio's Roman History lxviii. 33. 3.

³Dill, op. cit., p. 145.

when he first appeared at the bar.¹ The success with which he avoided the wrath of Domitian would indicate that he either withdrew from public life or chose his words and actions with prudence. His inheritance allowed him to live comfortably and to follow the pursuits of his heart. He had occupied a place in the Senate and his contacts reached throughout the Roman world. He was accorded numerous honors.²

Nerva, during his own brief reign, recognized the inherent genius of Pliny and made him prefect of the Treasury of Saturn. Additional responsibilities were placed upon him by Trajan, his last appointment being to the province of Bithynia which originally had been a "senatorial" province, meaning that it had been administered by the Senate by pro-consuls chosen from lot among the Senators. This form of government had not been successful. As a result, Trajan chose to take over responsibility himself, and he sent Pliny as his delegate, hoping to reduce the confusion that existed in the municipal governments of the province.³

The choice was excellent, as the conscientious Pliny threw himself into the task. He was characterized by his integrity, thoroughness, and his remarkably high standards of moral conduct.⁴ His appointment was made about the year

¹Pliny Letters v. 8.

²Gibbon, op. cit., II, 26.

³Boak, op. cit., p. 316.

⁴Dill, op. cit., p. 143.

A.D. 111 and was terminated with his death, which must have followed after about two years. At least, there is indication that he was no longer alive in 115 when Trajan assumed the title of "Parthicus."

Pliny was married three times but did not leave children from any of his marriages. His first marriage evidently took place while he was still a youth and just beginning his practice.¹ There is no hint concerning what may have happened to his first wife, but his second wife died in A.D. 97 and later he married for the third time. The tenderness of his letters to Calpurnia, his third wife, reveals something of his nature:

It is incredible how I miss you; such is the tenderness of my affection for you, and so unaccustomed are we to a separation! I lie awake the greatest part of the night in conjuring up your image, and by day (to use a very common, but true expression) my feet carry me of their own accord to your apartment, at those hours I used to visit you; but not finding you there, I return with as much sorrow and disappointment as an excluded lover. . . .²

It appears that one of the chief criticisms launched against him was his too great consideration of people and his too great generosity in his comments of his friends. He wrote to Septicius:

There are, you say, who have condemned me to you, as being upon all occasions too lavish in commendation of my friends. I own, nay, welcome the

¹Pliny Letters i. 18.

²Pliny Letters vii. 5.

impeachment; for can there be a nobler error than an excess of benevolence.¹

Calvina, the daughter of one of his friends, was left an estate which owed considerable money to Pliny. Realizing that she was in no position to assume the debt, he wrote her: ". . . that I may give you a more substantial encouragement to do so, than mere words, I entirely acquit you of the debt which he owed me."²

Pliny must have seemed a strange person. Born during the orgies of Nero and having lived through the excesses of Domitian, he apparently absorbed none of the evil character that dominated phases of Roman life. Obviously, Trajan's decision to send him to misruled Bithynia was good fortune to the residents of that country.

In spite of the possible questionable authenticity of the Pliny-Trajan correspondence, it is almost universally accepted as being genuine. Only a single manuscript has come to light. It was discovered in Paris about A.D. 1500 and supposedly taken to Italy a short time later. It was used by a number of people over the next decade and then suddenly disappeared, and nothing has been heard of it since. Little is known as to the age or condition of the manuscript.³

¹Pliny Letters vii. 28.

²Pliny Letters ii. 4.

³Ramsay, op. cit., p. 196.

For several centuries it was not highly regarded and only in the last century has it been recognized as giving incomparable insight into the provincial administration of late first--and early second--century Rome.

The two letters that are of particular interest to this paper are apparently genuine. The one by Pliny is typical of his style and of the concern which he characteristically showed for the task to which he was assigned. Trajan's answer is less lengthy and perhaps typical of the letter of a busy administrator. Ramsay remarks that Trajan dictated the letters which were addressed to Pliny.¹

The correspondence between Trajan and Pliny is lengthy and covers a wide field of governmental problems. Pliny must have felt some concern about writing so often, but Trajan assured him that he need not hesitate to write.²

Pliny's letter concerning the Christians follows:

It is a rule, Sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of guiding my uncertainty or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials of the Christians, I am unacquainted with the method and limits to be observed either in examining or punishing them. Whether any difference is to be made on account of age, or no distinction allowed between the youngest and the adult; whether repentance admits to a pardon, or if a man has been once a Christian it avails him nothing to recant; whether the mere profession of Christianity, albeit without crimes, or only the crimes associated therewith are

¹Ibid., p. 197.

²Pliny Letters x. 82.

punishable--in all these points I am greatly doubtful.

In the meanwhile, the method I have observed towards those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel no doubt that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement. There were others also possessed with the same infatuation, but being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be carried thither.

These accusations spread (as is usually the case) from the mere fact of the matter being investigated and several forms of the mischief came to light. A placard was put up, without any signature, accusing a large number of persons by name. Those who denied they were or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the Gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the Gods, and who finally cursed Christ--none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing--these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and denied it: true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five years ago. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the Gods, and cursed Christ.

They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt, or their error was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food--but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even these practices, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations. I

judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses; but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition.

I therefore adjourned the proceedings, and betook myself at once to your counsel. For the matter seemed to me well worth referring to you--especially considering the numbers endangered. Persons of all ranks and ages, and of both sexes are, and will be, involved in the prosecution. For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts; it seems possible, however, to check and cure it. 'Tis certain at least that the temples, which had been almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred festivals, after long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for sacrificial animals, which for sometime past have met with but few purchasers. From hence it is easy to imagine what multitudes may be reclaimed from this error, if a door be left open to repentance.¹

The date of the correspondence cannot be precisely determined, but it must have fallen in A.D. 112 or early in the following year. Christianity had obviously spread rapidly throughout this province and even the rural areas must have been touched by it. The temples were nearly deserted and the practice of sacrificing had been seriously curtailed.

In summing up the practices of the Christians, Pliny informed Trajan that on a certain day of the week they met before daylight to sing hymns and to bind themselves together in an oath against any wicked deeds. Following this meeting they separated but would re-assemble for the purpose of taking food. Assembly for meals appears as a crucial

¹Pliny Letters x. 96.

point, for he believed it to be innocent, though behind this thinking there may still have been the feeling that it was a form of cannibalism or some other heinous crime. They had, however, abandoned the practice of eating together when ordered not to do so on the basis that no political associations were to be allowed. Characteristic of the movement was a high standard of moral conduct which included abstinence from all wicked deeds, fraud, theft, adultery, and lying. There was also a passionate belief in the deity of Christ.

It is not clear who brought the charge against the Christians, nor is the nature of the charge known. In view of the influence which Christianity was having on the area, it is possible that the charge was made by the local priests, or possibly it had wrecked the economy of those who dealt in image-making as had happened in Ephesus, and it was they who launched the complaint.

With usual efficiency Pliny attempted to get at the heart of the matter. The affairs of State were disorganized because of the inefficient governors who had preceded him, and any attempt to remedy this situation would almost certainly have brought him into immediate contact with this new "superstition."

Pliny's method of testing the Christians was to ask them three times if they were Christians. If they persisted in answering yes on each occasion, even after having been

warned that a positive answer carried with it a sentence of death, he had them executed. It was his opinion that regardless of the nature of the religion such obstinacy was worthy of punishment. As the problem continued to grow he recieved an anonymous letter which accused a long list of people of being Christians. These people were brought before him and those who denied being Christians and who would curse Christ, were freed. Others confessed to having been Christians but insisted that they had since given up the superstition, and upon worshipping a statue of Trajan and cursing Christ they also were released.

Another group first professed Christianity, but when pressed on the matter and when faced with the consequences, retracted the position. Still others were accused, but being Roman citizens it was necessary for them to be sent to Rome before action was taken in their cases.

Pliny seemed to have been sure what to do when he was dealing with those who publicly and openly confessed their guilt; however, he was confused with the other groups. Thus it becomes clear that in his mind professing the Name was adequate basis for persecution. No evidence was needed of a crime other than that associated with the cult, namely, the destruction of accepted social patterns and the turning away from the Roman religion.

He credits his ignorance of the method of dealing with Christians to the fact that he had not been present at

the trial of a Christian. His concern covered several areas. The first was what should be done with those who confessed once having had something to do with the superstition but who were now willing to deny it. Ramsay suggests that Pliny was maintaining that mere penitence for past crimes was not enough to merit complete pardon.¹ A repentant criminal was to be dealt with more generously than an unrepentant one, but he could not escape some responsibility for his crime.

In an attempt to probe deeper into the practices of the cult he had two female slaves, called deaconesses, tortured. From them he could deduce nothing more than depravity and excessive superstition. This lack of evidence evidently created confusion in his mind, for even though Christianity was repulsive to him, it apparently was harmless. He must have dismissed from his mind the idea that child murder or any similar crime was associated with its practices. This knowledge apparently caused him to wonder whether the confession of the Name was really basis for the penalty of death.

Because of his indecision, he halted the trials and wrote to Trajan asking him for directions concerning the matter. He wondered if exceptions were to be made in the case of children, and he pointed out that those of all ranks of both sexes were involved. He had hope of stamping out the superstition even though it was widespread, and he

¹Ramsay, op. cit., p. 204.

indicated that there was a noticeable return to the temples and a restoration of the festivals as well as a demand for sacrificial animals since he had begun the persecution.

There is no indication that Pliny was asking for a relaxed ruling. The obstinacy of the Christians was evidently painful to him. Yet, there was doubt in his mind that they were breaking any laws; that is, any law other than the neglect of the local religions, which also reflected a lack of patriotism.

It is apparent that there was no clearly defined law of the land which prohibited the practice of Christianity. If there had been, Pliny would have known of it and would not have found it necessary to contact the emperor. Yet persecution must have been practiced in other places, or Pliny would not have gone ahead with his first action in such a positive manner. So it must have been generally assumed by this time that Christianity was of such a nature that it needed to be dealt with in a severe manner. The first responsibility was to maintain peace. Any indication that the cult was disturbing the peace was considered reason enough for persecution.

Pliny seemed convinced that the Christians were not breaking any of the established laws of the land, and he also discovered that Christianity was morally acceptable. However, there were political overtones. It had already been decreed that the Christians were not to meet together for a

meal because similar societies had proven to be a problem in the province. Following a great fire in Nicomedia, Pliny had asked if it might not be well to institute a guild of firemen, not to include more than one hundred and fifty men. To this request Trajan answered:

You are of opinion it would be proper to constitute a guild of firemen in Nicomedia, agreeably to what has been practiced in several other places. But it is to be remembered that this sort of societies have greatly disturbed the peace of your province in general, and of those cities in particular. Whatever title we give them, and whatever our object in giving it, men who are banded together for a common end will all the same become a political association before long. It will therefore be better to provide suitable means for extinguishing fires, and enjoin owners of house-property to employ these themselves, calling in the help of the populace when necessary.¹

So, even though Pliny recognized that, at the time Christianity was a harmless superstition, he also entertained the fear that it might develop into a political movement. The fanaticism of the Christians, which caused them to accept death in preference to renouncing Christ, must have been perplexing. Thus the interference was not strictly on the basis of its being a religion opposed by Rome, but also because it potentially harbored a system which could have led to political intrigue. For this reason Pliny had not hesitated to condemn those who obstinately refused to renounce it.

The extent of the authority of governors apparently was limited at only two points. The governor could not

¹Pliny Letters x. 34.

condemn to death a Roman citizen. The second was a limitation on the sentencing of long prison terms or periods of exile.¹ The governor was granted considerable leeway in the handling of all other administrative problems, including those that dealt with the area of religion.

It may be noted that Pliny's request for information is expressed in the first section of his letter. The remainder, and longer part, is the relating of his experience with the Christians, including what he had learned about the new faith, as well as what action he had already taken. He requested information on the following matters: "Whether any difference is to be made on account of age, or no distinction allowed between the youngest and the adult," and "whether repentance admits to a pardon, or if a man has been once a Christian it avails him nothing to recant." and lastly "whether the mere profession of Christianity, albeit without crimes, or only the crimes associated therewith are punishable." He then added: "In all these points I am greatly doubtful."² Trajan's letter answered each of these inquiries:

The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made for these people; when they

¹Ramsay, op. cit., p. 209.

²Pliny Letters x. 96.

are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our Gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Information without the accuser's name subscribed must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.¹

Trajan's first words commended Pliny for the wise manner in which he had handled the matter. His saying that it was not possible to lay down a general rule which could be applied in all cases, further indicates that there was no basic regulation outlawing Christianity. In addition, the emperor informed the governor that the State was not to take the initiative in seeking out the Christians. It may be deduced from these statements that Pliny was not to use the same standard in judging all cases. Presumably, this would mean that exceptions were to be made in case of children or at any other point where good judgment would deem it wise.

Concerning the question of whether mere profession of the Name was adequate basis for persecution, Trajan answered: "when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished."² This leaves little doubt concerning the generally accepted policy of the empire. There is no indication concerning the length of time that this had been the policy. Pliny's early acts of persecution indicate that it may have been established before this time. However, his

¹Pliny Letters x. 97.

²Pliny Letters x. 97.

writing to Trajan concerning the matter implies that Pliny was not clear enough in his own mind that he felt free to carry out such action with so large a number of people. It seems necessary to be content to recognize that at least from this time on mere profession of the Name was basis for persecution.

Regarding Pliny's question concerning those who had recanted, the emperor said:

when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our Gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion.¹

Thus, repenting did remove one from all guilt in the matter. This is a more generous attitude than Pliny may have expected.

The correspondence ends on a high note as Trajan explicitly instructs the governor to accept no accusation in which the accuser has refused to submit his name. He considered it a dangerous precedent and inconsistent with the "spirit of the age."² This seems to substantiate Dio and others who considered Trajan to be a benevolent and just Emperor.

The instruction that the Christians were not to be sought out by the State raises several interesting questions. Did Trajan give this instruction because he felt they were

¹Pliny Letters x. 97.

²Pliny Letters x. 97.

really not dangerous, or was it just his nature to be lenient as far as it was possible? Or perhaps he felt that to seek out the Christians and destroy them would raise greater confusion and unrest than leaving them alone. But who was bringing the Christians to the attention of Pliny? For this query there is still no answer, though the most logical suggestions would be the local priests, who stood to suffer as a result of the almost empty temples; or those who dealt in sacrificial animals, for which there had been virtually no demand, might also have been sorely pressed into some such action.

Pliny states that his first persecution partially rectified these conditions. This might have encouraged either of these two groups to promote further action.

At no point does Trajan reverse the pattern which the governor had already followed. There is little to indicate that Pliny felt the present attitude too harsh, though some scholars believe that he did think so.¹ It would appear that he was more concerned that his action be consistent with the thinking of the emperor. Pliny's nature was one of generosity and kindness, but he was also a lawyer and a provincial governor. It is doubtful that he would have been willing to let feelings of sympathy sway him from carrying out the office to which he had been appointed.

¹Ramsay, op. cit., p. 221.

It is possible to draw several conclusions from the abbreviated correspondence between the emperor and the governor concerning the Christians. There had been no specific legislative action or edict to prohibit the practicing of the Christian faith, but Christians were by this time persecuted as a result of a gradual and growing imperial policy. The basis for this persecution apparently was their obstinacy, fanaticism, and rejection of the accepted religious and social practices of the empire. Both Trajan and Pliny felt compelled to carry out the persecution even though there is doubt as to their enthusiasm for the task.

Evidence detailing the extent of this persecution is virtually nonexistent. There is no knowledge concerning the number who were involved in Bithynia, and nothing is known about the rest of the Empire. The persecution must not have been extensive, however, for the Church later regarded Trajan as one of the more benevolent rulers.

The Date and Significance of I Peter

There is considerable disagreement concerning the probability that I Peter was written about the time or immediately following the Pliny-Trajan correspondence. The letter is addressed to "the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."¹ Pontus was located on the southern coast of the Black Sea,

¹I Peter 1:1.

directly east of Bithynia, and was part of the area over which Pliny was made governor. The letter contains a strong element of hope and courage to those who are faced with persecution. "I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God; stand fast in it."¹ A vivid reference is made to the persecution that must have been raging. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you."² However, only the last one-fourth of the Epistle is concerned with the problem of persecution. The rest deals with the general concept of the Christian life.

Tradition has agreed that the letter came from Peter, and as a result it was necessary to give the writing an early date. Eusebius maintains the authenticity of it.³ He mentions that Irenaeus referred to it, but when it is noted that Irenaeus did not write until about A.D. 185, the fixing of the date of the letter from Peter is considerably less conclusive than some have argued. It could have been well into the second century before the letter appeared and still have come to the attention of Irenaeus.

The writings of Polycarp show enough similarities to this letter to suggest that he was familiar with it. The

¹I Peter 5:12b.

²I Peter 4:12.

³Eusebius Ecclesiastical History iii. 3.

following examples substantiate this point:

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands.¹

Then let us teach our wives to remain in the faith taught them and in charity and purity to cherish their husbands in all truth.²

This is the true grace of God; stand fast in it.³

Stand fast, therefore, in this conduct.⁴

Honor all men, Love the brotherhood.⁵

. . . lovers of the brotherhood, loving each other, united in truth.⁶

However, even though this similarity is obvious, it seems inadequate evidence for suggesting a date as early as the seventh decade of the first century as some scholars have maintained.⁷ Polycarp did not die until after the middle of the second century, and even if his letter is dated as early as 135,⁸ the possibility of early second century authorship would not be eliminated. This deduction helps only in determining that it could not have been written after A.D. 135.

¹I Peter 3:1a.

²Polycarp To the Philippians (New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1947), 4. 2.

³I Peter 5:12b.

⁴Polycarp To the Philippians 10. 1.

⁵I Peter 2:17.

⁶Polycarp To the Philippians 10. 1.

⁷Archibald Hunter, "Introduction, the First Epistle of Peter." The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1957), XII. 77, 78.

⁸Francis W. Beare, The First Epistle of Peter (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), p. 10.

Until the time of Polycarp there had been three persecutions: the first, in the reign of Nero about A.D. 64 to 68; the second, during the closing years of the reign of Domitian, approximately A.D. 93 to 96; and the third, the one discussed in this chapter, which took place during the time of Trajan, and can be assigned to the years of A.D. 111 to 113.

The traditionally accepted theory has maintained that this letter was written by Peter during the closing years of Nero's reign. Hunter suggests that it was written just before the persecution broke out, or Peter would not have counseled loyalty to the emperor.¹ He also insists that the letter speaks of impending persecution rather than the actual experience. The use of the word "Babylon" presents a problem, but he suggests that this use was a precautionary disguise.²

However, there is no evidence that the Neronian persecution was anything other than local. If the immediate cause of persecution was the fire, or a similar event, why would it have been necessary to write to such distant provinces as Bithynia and Pontus and warn them of an impending disaster? It is doubtful how widespread Christianity could have been in so remote a place as Pontus at such an early date.

¹Hunter, op. cit., p. 80.

²Loc. cit.

Those who maintain the date of Domitian are faced with equally difficult problems. This dating would allow for the Church to have developed in that area, and Revelation emphatically states that the problem of persecution in Asia was severe, but, there is a lack of evidence for this persecution other than that which is found in the Apocalypse. More to the point, however, is that the epistle does not deal with the same problems as those found in the Apocalypse. The author of the epistle can counsel the people to honor the emperor and to be subject to him. It hardly seems likely that this letter could have been written in the midst of a demand for emperor worship.

There are several reasons why a later date seems the most practical. These are based on internal evidence and are related to the matter of authorship. The first is the lack of probability that Peter was as familiar with the Greek language as the epistle evidences. The letter shows a certain amount of literary ability which required a good background in Greek. The education of Peter as presented by the New Testament would not lead one to believe that he excelled in this area. Cranfield answers this objection:

But the difficulty disappears at once, if we attribute to Silvanus (mentioned in 5:12 as Peter's amanuensis) a rather more responsible share in the composition of the letter than that of a mere scribe writing to dictation. It is reasonable to attribute to him the refinements of Greek grammar and style and the literary vocabulary, while at the same time recognizing in the letter the message, personality and apostolic authority of Peter. This would also

explain something else that would be surprising in Peter himself--the close familiarity with the Greek version of the Old Testament (the LXX), which the letter displays.¹

Hunter identified Silvanus with the Silas of Acts.² He maintains that Silvanus was a person of such skill that Peter would have trusted him to edit material and that Silvanus would have been most capable of doing it. Selwyn agrees with this observation.³

It seems impossible to draw a conclusion from this evidence. It may be assumed that Peter was not capable of producing a letter of this nature from his own pen, but this assumption would not rule out the possibility of his having a hand in its composition.

The second argument is also closely related to that of authorship. The epistle does not show an intimate relationship with Jesus. The references to him are general and lacking the detail that might be expected from one who lived closely with Jesus. The suggestion by Hunter that the statement, "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed,"⁴ is a

¹C. E. B. Cranfield, The First Epistle of Peter (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 8.

²Hunter, op. cit., p. 78.

³E. G. Selwyn, The First Epistle of Peter (London: Macmillan and Co., 1949), p. 11.

⁴I Peter 5:1.

reference to the transfiguration, is not conclusive.¹ This lack of detail about Jesus is partially explained by the brevity and nature of the letter, but it seems likely that one of the twelve would have authenticated Peter's statements by more direct references to the time that he had spent with Jesus.

If Petrine authorship must be discarded, this act destroys the most compelling reason for giving the letter an early date. As will be pointed out, virtually all other evidence leans toward a later period. A desire to credit this writing to Peter has caused some scholars to minimize the weight of the evidence which suggests a time after the end of the first century.

Another reason for a late date is the dependence of the I Peter upon other writings. This dependence is particularly true in the case of Matthew and Luke. The suggestion that the writer of the epistle and the authors of the gospels are drawing upon a common source cannot be ignored, but, the probability is that the epistle is dependent upon the gospels. Following are examples:

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.²

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you

¹Hunter, op. cit., p. 78.

²Matt. 5:11.

are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.¹

I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter.²

But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.³

Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning.⁴

Therefore gird up your minds.⁵

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.⁶

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you.⁷

It is difficult to know how far one can legitimately pursue this form of argument. But these are only a few of the examples which would indicate that the author of I Peter was familiar with these two gospels. A similar problem exists in relation to the Pauline documents. There is marked similarity between many passages, and one in particular bears mentioning because it does not appear in just this manner in the gospels. It has been previously mentioned because of its similarity to a Polycarp passage.

Wives, be subject to your husbands.⁸

¹I Peter 4:14.

²Matt. 12:34.

³I Peter 4:5.

⁴Luke 12:35.

⁵I Peter 1:13a.

⁶Luke 14:11.

⁷I Peter 5:6.

⁸Ephesians 5:22.

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands.¹

The problem of authorship of Ephesians must be recognized; nevertheless, there are enough examples throughout the recognized Pauline writings to feel the scope of the situation.

It will suffice to give on additional example:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching.²

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by strength which God supplies.³

Scholars have introduced the possibility that Paul was dependent upon Peter, but Bennett writes: "In view of Paul's original and fertile mind, and of emphatic declarations that he was not indebted for his teaching to the older apostles, this view is very improbable."⁴

It is possible to argue for an early date and still recognize Peter's dependence upon Paul. But it is probably another matter concerning Ephesians, and certainly would be in relation to the gospels. Unless one insists on the improbable theory that Paul and the Gospel writers are dependent upon Peter, or the equally improbable theory that there

¹I Peter 3:1a.

²Rom. 12:6-7.

³I Peter 4:10-11b.

⁴W. H. Bennett, The General Epistles (New York: Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1901), p. 36.

is no dependence in either direction, a late date is required.

The next argument for a late date is the nature of the crime associated with Christianity. As already indicated, it was not until the reign of Trajan that there is evidence that Christians were persecuted for the "Name." It seems evident that at the time of the writing of I Peter persecution for professing the faith was being done, though Hart does not agree.¹ He maintains that the epistle does not insist that Christianity was illegal, but his conclusion does not seem to be in keeping with the following passage:

But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God.²

Hunter maintains that there is no reason to believe that persecution for the Name did not take place before the second century. He suggests that if Paul was put to death in A.D. 62, the profession of Christianity probably became a crime shortly after this.³ There is no tangible basis on which to insist that such a decree could not have been issued, but neither is there basis to prove that it was

¹F. J. A. Hart, The First Epistle of Peter (London: Macmillan and Co., 1898), p. 3.

²I Peter 4:13-15.

³Hunter, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

made. It is difficult to believe that the Synoptics, Acts, and other first century writers would have been completely silent upon the matter, and so obviously sympathetic to Rome, if their religion had already been pronounced illegal. Even Revelation does not infer this. The only quarrel that it has with the State is that the State is demanding emperor worship. As suggested earlier, opposition to Christianity was not a pronouncement or a legal action, but a growing opinion of the State which was only solidifying at the time of Trajan. If this had been the position of the Roman government since the time of Nero it seems obvious that Pliny would have been aware of the fact.

It is further noted that this is the time for which there is evidence that persecution in Bithynia and Pontus was taking place, and that Christians were being persecuted for the Name only. Wand asserts that Pliny's letter to Trajan seems as though it might be lifted from the epistle.¹ This, of course, would not be possible unless one assumed that Pliny had read I Peter, and that it impressed him until he was virtually quoting it. This position is not tenable. It seems more likely that the epistle is referring to the conditions that Pliny expressed in his letter. Wand has put it the other way because he maintains I Peter dates from the persecution of Nero.

¹J. W. C. Wand, The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude (London: Methuen and Co., 1934), p. 15.

To insist that the epistle comes from a period in the first century would mean that Christianity had achieved a state of development for which there is little or no evidence. It is doubtful that Rome, until the fall of Jerusalem, was aware of the difference between the Jewish religion and Christianity. How, then, could it have persecuted the Christians only for the Name?

As previously mentioned, it appears that a desire to grant Petrine authorship to the epistle has caused some scholars to overlook these important factors. In summation there are several reasons for placing the time of writing in the second century.

First, its dependence upon other sources is so obvious that it is impossible to accept the fact that it is merely a case of drawing upon common sources. This conclusion would necessitate a time near the end of the first century as the earliest possible date; the development of Christianity in such remote areas as Pontus would demand a lapse of considerable time, and the reason for the persecution, that is, persecution for the Name, cannot be authenticated before the reign of Trajan.

I Peter has three passages which allude to the discussion of Church and State relationships. The first is:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials.¹

¹I Peter 1:6.

The author comes quickly to the point. Persecution is a real possibility. There is no doubt that the Church had already experienced attack, and based on this previous experience it was possible to predict that another period of persecution had either begun or was in the making. The writer attempts to soften the blow of this announcement by first reminding the Christians of that good day which was to come.

The second reference is of the greatest interest:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants to God. Honor all men.¹ Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.¹

Cullmann simply comments:

We have not devoted a special chapter to the two passages I Peter 2:13f and Titus 3:1f, because, with most exegetes, we recognize a material and perhaps literary relationship between them and Romans 13:1ff.²

Hunter agrees that the two writers may have been drawing from a common source, but indicates that there are also differences.³ In any case, it is clear that the advice here is be loyal to the emperor. The State does have a role to perform, and the Christians are to support the State in these

¹I Peter 2:13-17.

²Cullmann, op. cit., p. 70.

³Hunter, op. cit., p. 114.

efforts, and being loyal subjects will tend to reduce the false accusations being brought against them.

Bigg draws a clear line between the Romans and I Peter passages. However, it should be noted that his interpretation, as well as Hunter's is undoubtedly influenced by their firm belief in the authorship of Peter. Bigg compares the passages:

Both in expression and in point of view St. Peter differs very widely here from St. Paul, who speaks of Caesar as holding his authority from God, not from the people. A doctrine of divine right could be built upon the words of St. Paul, but not upon those of St. Peter.¹

Beare suggests that this is a point at which the composer of I Peter may be leaning upon Paul.² There is no indication however, that the authority of civil government has been granted by God. So, while this passage does not stand in contradiction to the Pauline statement, it is probably best regarded as a softening of that position. Beare also points out that a danger exists lest one read the concept of Paul into this passage. Thus, one is not to show obedience to the State as a part of a contractual arrangement, but as a part of one's obedience to God.

It is obvious that Romans was written before the first persecution fell on the Christians. Paul could say,

¹Charles Bigg, The Epistle of St. Peter and St. Jude "The International Critical Commentary" (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), p. 139.

²Beare, op. cit., p. 114.

"He who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."¹ The more perplexing question is: how could the I Peter passage have been written during a time of persecution? It probably could not have been during the attacks of the debased and despised first century persecutors, Nero and Domitian, but the persecution under Trajan was a different matter. The State was not hunting down Christians for the pleasure of destroying them; it was acting, and then seemingly without joy, only when there was an accusation lodged against the Christians, leaving the rulers without alternative. Is it possible that the leading Christians recognized the delicate position in which Trajan and Pliny found themselves?

This section concludes with the abrupt statements, "Fear God. Honor the Emperor." Obviously, no one would have considered this association as an attempt to equate the two. Beare thinks this is a reference to Proverbs.² He is suggesting that the wise and right course is to honor the emperor, but this act is something quite less than "Fearing God."

The third passage is the one quoted earlier, and it deals with the question of persecution for the Name of Christian. The tenor of the epistle suddenly becomes solemn at this juncture. Instead of dealing with the general area of

¹Rom. 13:2.

²Beare, op. cit., p. 119.

the Christian faith it suddenly seems to be concerned with a specific problem. It indicates that these Christians were not prepared for the persecution and it would seem strange and unreal to them. This was a clear insight, for the first reaction would undoubtedly have been one of self-pity; but the author points out that even in persecution there is reason for rejoicing.

The use of the word **πυρώσει** may have been the result of the influence of Proverbs: "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold."¹ The meaning of **πυρώσει** is not limited to the concept of being consumed by a blaze, but could also refer to being exposed to fire, such as through baking or boiling.² In the Proverbs passage there is the thought of the refining action, and this element may be involved in the author's thinking in this statement. Thus Hunter's suggestion that "trial by fire" might be a better translation seems to be well taken.³

The phrase **τὸ τῆς δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα** is also recognized as being difficult to translate, and it is possible that the phrase **καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ** was a later addition. Both the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version translate it, "The spirit of glory and of God," which apparently is as accurate as can be achieved. The

¹Prov. 27:21.

²Selwyn, op. cit., p. 221.

³Hunter, op. cit., p. 221.

interest of this study is greatly concerned with the two phrases, ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ (for the name of Christ) and ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ (translated by Selwyn as "virtue of bearing this name,"¹ and the Revised Standard Version as "under that name.")

There is little doubt that being a Christian was basis for persecution. It brought about the same consequences as being a murderer or a thief, which is consistent with the correspondence of Pliny. Pliny had asked if it were necessary for Christians to be guilty of any crime other than being a Christian. Trajan answered that it was not necessary for there to be guilt of any additional crime; to admit to being a Christian was guilt itself.

The writer of I Peter faces this fact but insists that punishment for this admission is not to be feared as much as the fate of those who do not remain loyal to the Gospel.

This epistle breaks radically from the position of Revelation and reverts to a position similar to that of the Synoptics and the writings of Paul. This stand is even more surprising when it is recognized that the I Peter was written in the midst of persecution while the others were not, with the possible exception of Mark. It does face the probability of martyrdom, but not with great bitterness. It was

¹Selwyn, op. cit., p. 223.

considered as a test that would determine their merit to be called followers of Christ. In the final analysis there was still a loyalty to Rome. Grant seems to express the heart of it:

The best example of Christian loyalism is provided by the so-called first epistle of Peter, directed from Rome to the Christians of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. The author calls on these Christians for absolute loyalty and obedience to the Roman emperor and his subordinates, thus reiterating the statement of Paul to the Roman Church half a century earlier. He urges the preservation of a hierarchical social structure and commands his readers to suffer as Christians, not as malefactors. The address of the letter and the mention of suffering "as Christians" proves conclusively that it was written (though doubtless with the use of earlier materials) in the reign of Trajan. It came to Asia too late, however, to undo the harm done by the Revelation of John.¹

It is possible that Grant has over-simplified the problem. Yet, it cannot be denied that the letter of I Peter is counseling loyalty to Rome regardless of the impending persecution.

¹Grant, op. cit., p. 71.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The State and the Will of God

The New Testament attitude toward the Roman government maintains remarkable consistency with the notable exception of Revelation. Paul established a trend in his letter to the Romans that is both directly and indirectly reflected in the works of subsequent writers. The Synoptics do not counsel obedience to the emperor in the same manner as do Romans and I Peter, but in their interpretation of the trial of Jesus they clearly indicated where their sympathy lay.

It is possible to draw some general conclusions which express the attitude of the early Christian movement toward the State. First, the existence of the State was consistent with the will of God. Paul wrote: "He who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."¹ The writer of I Peter advised: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,

¹Rom. 13:2.

or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right."¹

This statement, however, did not imply that the State was a permanent institution, because it was soon to be replaced by a celestial order.² Thus its length of service was definitely limited, but this lack of permanence did not greatly affect the respect that was to be granted to it during the time it existed.

Second, the State was the instrument through which justice was to be maintained. Not even Revelation counseled disobedience to the State except in the instance of emperor worship. Presumably, the government had a right to use force in carrying out justice, and Christians were to support the State through the payment of taxes.³ Christians should do all within their power to see that they did not break any law and thus deserve the chastisement of the government.⁴

The relationship of the Christian to the emperor was not merely one of submission, for both respect and honor were to be shown. Paul wrote, "respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due."⁵ The letter of I Peter simply states, "Honor the emperor."⁶

¹I Peter 2:13-14.

²Rom. 13:11; Luke 12:40.

³Rom. 13:7; Mt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25.

⁴Rom. 13:3; I Peter 4:15.

⁵Rom. 13:7b.

⁶I Peter 2:17b.

Third, the State also had responsibilities, for it had not only the right but the duty to guarantee justice. It was to use its power to maintain conditions in which Christians would be safe and which would offer them an opportunity to live and to spread their Gospel. Failure to carry out these functions undoubtedly would bring the State under the judgment of God. It evidently was the opinion of the Church that the State, for the most part, was fulfilling its function.

Only the Book of Revelation stood in radical disagreement with this conviction. To the writer, Rome was the very instrument of Satan, and the emperor the personification of evil. The State was using all its diabolical strength in an attempt to destroy the Christian movement. It would fail only because God himself would intervene and in turn destroy Rome. Rome would ask no quarter, and none would be granted. This destruction was to take place in a relatively short time, probably not to exceed three-and-one-half years. In a sense, the Christian movement did destroy the pagan Roman empire, but it did so by the surprising method of making it a nominally Christian empire. The Edict of Toleration, however, did not fit into the thinking of the seer of the Apocalypse.

It can be assumed that Revelation was not consistent with the attitude of the majority of Christian leaders because the tone of this writing does not appear in the work

of a single contemporary. It must also be recognized that the Apocalypse may have been based on what actually did happen, and his bitterness may have been the result of his own unfortunate exile. Tertullian stated that the persecution under Domitian was of brief duration.¹ This limitation would not have made it more pleasant for those who were forced to experience abuse, but may explain why it did not arouse greater resentment among the Christians as a whole.

The Jewish-Christian Schism

The question still remains, why were the Christians so willing to come to the defense of Rome? It must be admitted that the State was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, the death of Paul, and probably of Peter, and the persecutions under Nero, Domitian, and Trajan. The answer to this question is complex, and is not clear in every facet. It must first be recognized that what appears obvious today, strangely enough, may not have appeared obvious during the first century. The one factor that was largely responsible for this lack of perception was the Christian-Jewish relationship.

Christianity saw her first and greatest enemy not as the Roman government, but as Judaism. Invalid as this might have been, the fact is that Christianity, to a large degree, accepted this as being the situation. There was some

¹Tertullian Apology 5.4.

disagreement between Jesus and the established religious order, and the extent that Judaism was involved in his crucifixion is not clear and may have been minute, but subsequent events caused Christians to see Jewish opposition out of proportion to the fact. The conflict which quickly developed between the followers of Christ and the Jews greatly influenced the thinking of the Christians. Evidence for this conflict is to be found in the persecution in which Paul was participating, and which brought about the death of Stephen.

If Acts is correct in stating that the Roman government did actually come to the rescue of Christians, particularly Paul, when they were being threatened by Jewish mobs, this protection would have led the Christians further to believe that their future lay with Rome. There is no doubt that the Christians' dislike for Judaism was unfortunate, and generally without basis. But the Christians did not understand it this way, and their distaste for Judaism evidently caused them to turn to Rome with an enthusiasm that was unrealistic. The willingness of the Gospel writers to shift the responsibility for Jesus' death from Rome to the Jews indicates how firmly they had aligned themselves with the State. This alliance was not the only example either, for by A.D. 66 the Christians had left Jerusalem and moved to Pella rather than take part in the revolt against Rome.

The Continued Christian Sympathy for Rome

Even though it may be assumed that the first attitude of Christianity was sympathetic toward Rome, why did this feeling not change under the pain of persecution? There are two reasons. The first one is centered in the possibility that the persecutions were less severe than has generally been thought. This possible lack of severity coupled with the poor communications of the day, may have caused them to have less impact on the Christian movement than is commonly believed. It is also important to note that persecution was not unusual in the first century and may not have been viewed with as intense a feeling as it is in a day when freedoms are more firmly a part of tradition.

The evidence for the first three persecutions notably fails to mention numbers. Only the persecution by Domitian is discussed with any detail in the New Testament, and oddly, this is the one persecution of the three that is not well corroborated by non-Christian sources. As mentioned, other Christian sources contradict the statements of the Apocalypse.

As for the persecution by Nero, Tacitus describes in detail the horror of the punishment,¹ but makes no mention of the number involved or how long it lasted. Suetonius is even less help for he merely states: "Punishment was

¹Tacitus The Annals xv. 44.

inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."¹ Again, it must be noted that this is not to argue that the persecutions did not make a great impact upon those who were affected by them, but it is to say that the impact may have been limited to a much smaller group of people than has previously been assumed.

The second reason why the Christian attitude did not change toward Rome even under the pain of persecution can be better documented. This is the concept that early Christianity associated the persecutions more with the persons of the debased Nero and Domitian than they did with Roman government per se. Even as late as his time, Tertullian was able to write: "Such have always been our persecutors, unjust, wicked, depraved men whom you yourselves are accustomed to condemn."²

There is an abundance of evidence that indicates the contempt with which the Roman populace held Nero. Suetonius wrote: "When he had thus aroused the hatred of all, there was no form of insult to which he was not subjected."³ Dio remarks that Nero's tour of Greece was one of brutality and devastation even though he went as a "friend."⁴ Certainly it would be a grave error to assume that it was only the Christians who had felt the heel of Nero. They could not

¹Suetonius Nero 16.

²Tertullian Apology 5.4.

³Suetonius Nero 45.

⁴Dio's Roman History lxii, 11. 1.

have hated him with greater passion than did most of the Roman citizens. Nero found courage to commit suicide only when he was informed that a delegation from the Senate was on its way to assassinate him.

Thus, not even the Christians could have believed him to be representative of the Roman government. He was a cruel and debased despot who had used his position of power to destroy ruthlessly and without reason everything that made him angry. This senseless violence was not characteristic of the eminently logical Roman government.

The same could be said, though perhaps less emphatically, of Domitian. Suetonius commented: "His savage cruelty was not only excessive, but also cunning and sudden."¹ The senate in particular had felt his brutality. The historian added that the Senators greeted the news of the emperor's assassination with wild rejoicing, and then proceeded to efface every remainder of him from the city. Based on Tertullian's statement it would seem that the Christians may not have suffered as much under Domitian as did many Roman citizens. This being the case, it is possible that the persecution was not interpreted as the act of the government, but as the actions of a mad man who acceded to the place of power. Lactantius substantiates this concept of Domitian. "After an interval of some years from the death of Nero,

¹Suetonius Domitian 11.

there arose another tyrant no less wicked (Domitian), who, although his government was exceedingly odious, for a very long time oppressed his subjects."¹ Eusebius not only agrees with this concept of Domitian, but further agrees that from Nero to Domitian there had been no persecution.²

Thus in the first century the only acts of persecution were launched by emperors whom the Church recognized as being equally as cruel towards non-Christians as they were towards Christians. There was reason to believe that as soon as the emperors were replaced by men who represented the benevolent spirit of the government, the persecution would cease; which is what did happen.

This concept did not change until the second century. It was at this time that a persecution took place in which two points were involved that had not been before that date: first, Christians were persecuted for the "Name" only; secondly, the persecution took place under the reign of a just and benevolent ruler. This was probably the time at which the Church began to realize that there was no hope of its living peacefully with Rome. This understanding would not immediately have been widespread, as is evidenced by I Peter. Several decades were to elapse before it was to solidify. The persecution by Hadrian was undoubtedly an additional

¹Lactantius On the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died. 3.

²Eusebius Ecclesiastical History iii. 17.

factor in bringing this realization about. Thus Tertullian and later Church Fathers viewed the Roman Empire with a bitterness that, with the single exception of Revelation, is notably lacking in the New Testament.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, C. A. The Message of the Book of Revelation. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1939.
- Angus, S. The Mystery Religions and Christianity. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.
- Bailey, Cyril. Phases in the Religion of Ancient Rome. London: Oxford University Press, 1932.
- Barnett, A. E. The New Testament, Its Making and Meaning. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946.
- Beare, Francis W. The First Epistle of Peter. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957.
- Beckwith, I. T. The Apocalypse of John. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919.
- Bennett, John C. Christians and the State. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.
- Bennett, W. H. The General Epistles. New York: Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1901.
- Bigg, Charles. The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude. "The International Critical Commentary" Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1902.
- Boak, Arthur. A History of Rome to 565 A.D. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1943.
- Brunner, Emil. The Letter to the Romans. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959.
- Burnett, A. W. The Lord Reigneth. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947.
- Cadoux, Cecil John. The Early Church and the World. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1955.
- Canfield, Leon, Early Persecutions of the Christians. New York: Hardy, Longmans, Green & Co., Agents, 1913.

- Case, S. J. The Revelation of John. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1910.
- Charles, R. H. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Vol. II. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1913.
- Charles, R. H. The Revelation of St. John. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950.
- Cicero. Translated by Clinton Walker Keyes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951.
- Clement. The Letter of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians. Translated by Francis X. Glimm. New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1947.
- Craig, Clarence Tucker. "First Corinthians" The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. X. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953.
- Craig, Clarence Tucker. The Beginnings of Christianity. New York: Abingdon Press, 1943.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. The First Epistle of Peter. London: SCM Press, 1950.
- Cullmann, Oscar. The State in the New Testament. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.
- Dill, Samuel. Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius. London: Macmillan and Co., 1905.
- Dio's Roman History. Translated by Earnest Cary. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955.
- Encyclopedia Britannica. "Nero" Vol. XVI. Chicago, London, Toronto: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1953 edition.
- Enslin, Morton Scott. Christian Beginnings Parts I and II. New York: Harper and Bros., Publishers, 1956.
- Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History. Translated by R. J. Defferrari. New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc. 1953.
- Foakes-Jackson, F. J. The Life of Saint Paul. London: Jonathan Cape, 1927.
- Foakes-Jackson, F. J. & Lake, Kirsopp. The Beginnings of Christianity. Vol. II. "The Acts of the Apostles" London: Macmillan and Co., 1922.

- Gibbons, Edward. The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1909.
- Grant, Robert M. The Sword and the Cross. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955.
- Goodspeed, E. J. An Introduction to the New Testament. Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1945.
- Harnack, Adlof. Luke the Physician. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907.
- Hart, F. J. A. The First Epistle of Peter. London: Macmillan Co., 1898.
- Hunter, Archibald. "Introduction, the First Epistle of Peter." The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. XII. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1957.
- Hunter, A. M. The Epistle to the Romans. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1955.
- Ignatius. To the Ephesians. Translated by Gerald Walsh. New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1947.
- Josephus. The Jewish Wars. Translated by St. J. Thackery. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926.
- Justin Martyr. Dialogue with Trypho. Translated by Thomas B. Falls. New York: Christian Heritage, Inc., 1948.
- Kennard, J. Spencer. Render to God. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- Kidd, B. J. A History of the Church to A.D. 461. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1922.
- Kiddle, Martin. The Revelation of St. John. New York: Harpers and Bros., 1940.
- Klausner, Joseph. Jesus of Nazareth. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1946.
- Knox, John. Chapters in the Life of Paul. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950.
- Knox, John. "Introduction, The Epistle to the Romans." The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. IX. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954.

- Lactantius. On the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.
- Lake, Kirsopp. The Earlier Epistles. London: Rivingtons, 1927.
- Lightfoot, J. B. St. Clement of Rome. London: Macmillan and Co., 1877.
- Livy. Translated by Evan T. Stage. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949.
- Lucan. Translated by J. D. Duff. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951.
- MacGregor, G. H. C. "Introduction to Acts." The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. IX. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954.
- MacLean, Gilmour. "The Gospel According to St. Luke." The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. VIII. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952.
- Minucius Felix. Octavius. Translated by Gerald Rendall. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.
- Moehlman, Conrad Henry. The Christian-Jewish Tragedy. Rochester: The Printing House of Leo Hart, 1933.
- Mommson, Theodor. The Provinces of the Roman Empire. London: Macmillan and Co., 1909.
- Montefiore, C. G. The Synoptic Gospels. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1909.
- Mould, Elmer. Essentials of Bible History. New York: The Ronald Press, 1951.
- Parker, T. M. Christianity and the State in the Light of History. New York: College-Oxford, Harper and Bros., 1955.
- Peake, Arthur S. The Revelation of John. London: Joseph Johnson Primitive Methodist Publishing House, 1919.
- Pliny. Letters. Translated by William Melmoth. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.
- Pliny. Natural History. Vol. II. Translated by H. Rackman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947.

- Polycarp. To the Philippians. New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1947.
- Ramsay, W. M. The Church in the Roman Empire Before A.D. 170. London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1903.
- Rist, Martin. "Introduction, The Revelation of St. John the Divine." The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. XII. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1957.
- Roddy, Irving G. Paul Before Caesar. Chicago: The Judson Press, 1936.
- Rolfe, J. C. Suetonius. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.
- Scott, C. A. The Book of Revelation. London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1905.
- Selwyn, E. G. The First Epistle of Peter. London: Macmillan and Co., 1949.
- Souter, Alexander. "Rome, Roman" in Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels. Edited by James Hastings and others. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924.
- Swete, Henry C. The Apocalypse of St. John. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954.
- Tacitus. The Annals. Translated by John Jackson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956.
- Tertullian. Apology. Translated by T. R. Glover. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.
- Torrey, Charles C. The Apocalypse of John. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958.
- Wand, J. W. C. The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude. London: Methuen and Co., 1934.
- Wand, J. W. C. What St. Paul Said. London: Oxford University Press, 1952.